

The Duke's Price

Demetra^{and} Kenneth Brown

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MI FLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.

*Archive
Collection*



* This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days *



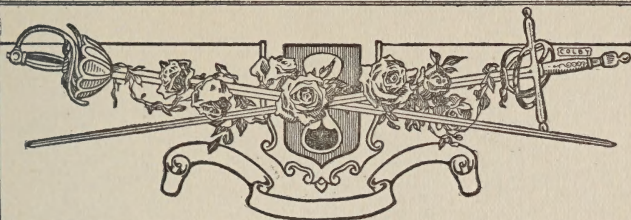
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2021 with funding from
Boston Public Library

<https://archive.org/details/dukesprice00vaka>

THE DUKE'S PRICE



STEPHANA



THE DUKE'S PRICE

BY

DEMETRA AND KENNETH BROWN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY A. G. LEARNED



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

The Riverside Press Cambridge

1910

COPYRIGHT, 1909 AND 1910, BY KENNETH BROWN

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published February 1910

TO
MARIANNA LOWE
AND HER FATHER

CONTENTS

I. WIND AND FATE	1
II. "QUI ÉTAIT CE JEUNE HOMME"	9
III. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DUKE	16
IV. AN ITALIAN GARDEN IN MID-WINTER NEW YORK	26
V. THE HOME-COMING OF THE NEW CHÂTELAINES	35
VI. CORBEILLE DE NOCES	44
VII. THE DE LONGTOURS AT HOME	53
VIII. THE DUKE'S KISS	60
IX. THE DUCHESS BOWS	68
X. THE HEART OF SOLANGE	73
XI. VALENTINE'S INDISCRETIONS	83
XII. THE DUKE AS CREDITOR	91
XIII. DE BRISSAC SEEKS ASSISTANCE	98
XIV. A SIDE-LIGHT ON THE DUKE	113
XV. A TELEGRAM	120
XVI. BY THE LIGHT OF A CANDLE	125
XVII. THE MARQUIS'S TOAST	131

XVIII.	FOR A BIT OF RIBBON	144
XIX.	THE GHOSTS OF THE CHÂTEAU	155
XX.	STEPHANA'S SLIPPER	163
XXI.	A WOMAN'S TONGUE	175
XXII.	AN ENTENTE CORDIALE	183
XXIII.	ESTELLE'S DINNER-PARTY	189
XXIV.	A PRINCESS, AND HER LOT	199
XXV.	BERTHA, THE WOMAN	207
XXVI.	A WATTEAU PANEL	213
XXVII.	ROLAND THINKS ALOUD	221
XXVIII.	HIS APPEAL	231
XXIX.	FROM A ROSE TRELLIS	239
XXX.	"AS THE OLD FRENCH NOBILITY WENT TO THE GUILLOTINE"	248
XXXI.	THE MARQUIS'S STAR IN THE ASCENDANT	255
XXXII.	ESTELLE UNMASKS	261
XXXIII.	"THE HUNTING THAT ENTRANCED HIS SOUL"	269
XXXIV.	AT BAY	278
XXXV.	DE LONGTOUR ENOUGH	285
XXXVI.	THE COLORS OF DAWN	287

THE DUKE'S PRICE

THE DUKE'S PRICE

CHAPTER I

WIND AND FATE

A MOTOR-CAR drove up to the curb in front of him, and a girl alighted, a box of flowers in her hand. At this instant a gust of the swirling November wind whipped the end of her long veil around a projection of the car, and gave her an impish push to make her lose her balance. She bade fair to be strangled, when the young man sprang forward and steadied her against the wind.

"Allow me," he said, in fluent English, yet with an intonation which bespoke the foreigner.

She felt the strength of his arm, and looked up into a pair of grave gray eyes.

"Thank you," she said. She disentangled herself slowly from the veil. "A most ungallant wind, is n't it, trying to execute a lady by hanging her. But perhaps it was only trying to rob me of my roses?"

He stooped and restored the box to her. "No more ungallant than indiscriminating, to choose the lesser of the two," he answered.

The girl smiled at the compliment so seriously delivered.

"Anyway, it was kind of you to save me from such a fate. Thank you very much," she repeated.

He took off his hat and stood bareheaded while she went into the entrance of the hotel. At the door, involuntarily, she glanced back and again met his eyes, as he stood where she had left him, oblivious of the icy wind, still holding his hat in his hand.

With a sigh the girl stepped into the elevator.

"Fourth floor." She took the flowers from their box. "Will you please throw this box away for me?"

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am."

With the roses in her hand she made her way to a room and knocked. A trained nurse opened the door.

"How is Mrs. Ralph this morning?" the girl asked.

"The same as usual. She will be better, though, the minute she sees you, Miss Brennan."

The nurse opened the door and ushered the girl into a small, sunny room where an old lady with a bright face and a helpless body was lying on a couch.

The girl kneeled beside the couch, took the

worn face between her hands and kissed it; and then, holding her off, demanded sternly: —

“Have you been good since I saw you last? Have you been obedient, and slept and eaten as you should?”

“O Stephana! And more roses? Have I not told you that you give me pleasure enough by bringing me yourself? But what dears they are, and how I thank you for them!”

Laying her cheek against that of the invalid, Stephana said, half humorously, half wistfully: —

“Don’t thank me, dear Mrs. Ralph. Let me thank you instead; for you are the only person in the world to whom I can be of some slight service. It makes me feel a little worth living.”

“Stephana! I am afraid you are in one of your moods again. What is it, child?”

“Oh, nothing special. I am to meet a new nobleman this afternoon, and I do not know why the idea should suddenly be so distasteful to me. I usually rather enjoy looking them over. I suppose I shall have to marry one of them some day.”

“But why?” the invalid asked with exasperation.

“Only because I know my father has set his heart on my making what the papers call ‘an illustrious alliance’ — and I intend to please him in this. It is the only thing I can do for him.”

The older woman took the girl's hand in her own, drew her close to her, and kissed her.

"Are you sure, dear, that Mr. Brennan wants you to marry a title?"

"Yes, I am. I do not say that it originated with him; but he wants it now. He has succeeded in everything in life, and as my stepmother believes in her heart, — though she would n't for worlds be so vulgar as to say it, — he can buy the best there is for me at any price. It is my father's weak spot — getting the best there is. And through many years of 'education' he has come to believe only the high nobility of the old country good enough to mate with Stephana Brennan, descendant of Irish kings — at least no one can prove she is n't. If my stepmother had children of her own I might have been let off; but she has n't, so I am going to marry to please him — only sometimes I can't help making dreams. I suppose it's the Italian blood of my mother; but sometimes I feel that I should like to be carried off my feet by a man — to have some mysterious force invading and transforming my life." She gave a little embarrassed laugh. "I should like to fall in love."

Mrs. Ralph had seen Stephana in various moods, but never before had heard her talk of herself so much. From the paternal grandmother — a stern New Englander — with whom she had

lived through her early girlhood, Stephana had learned reserve; and her present *abandon* surprised and troubled the woman who loved her as if she were her own child. She did not know that, for a few minutes, Stephana had looked into a pair of gray eyes which had set rebellion alight in her heart.

Stephana read pain in her friend's face, and taking both Mrs. Ralph's hands, she went on: —

“Let me tell you everything I feel, just this once. I shall probably be ashamed of this outburst later, but it will do me good to speak. I know what you all think of me — especially my stepmother. You think I am cold and indifferent and heartless. Circumstances have made me appear as I do — and I have let things drift. But if you only knew how I have suffered in my heart! I have felt like a merchant whose shelves were filled with merchandise, but who is passed by because he does not know how to display his goods. I have wanted so much to give, to be useful, to feel that my life was a source of pleasure to somebody. But I started out wrong. First, in coming into this world I killed my mother. It was not my fault, I know, but I did just the same. For years my father hated me — No, no, don't protest — I know he did; for he worshiped my mother. When my grandmother died, and I came to live with him and the new wife he took

to himself, although I was only a little girl of ten I wanted to love my father, to be of use to him, but—" She shrugged her shoulders. "It was no use, and I was fearfully lonely in that huge, luxurious house, surrounded by foreign governesses and brought up to be a great lady. If it had not been for my lovely Irish Maggie, with her plebeian brogue and her unmannerly ways, I think I should have gone mad."

Mrs. Ralph gave her friend a sympathetic pressure of the hand.

"You do not know what I have suffered because of my father. I know the big, splendid man he is. I worship him, dear Mrs. Ralph, and I have wanted to tell him how much I loved him, how much I longed to be of service to him, only he is always so busy, and treats me always as if I were a useless little girl. Once, when I was seventeen, I summoned up my courage to tell him all this, and tore down to his office before my courage should fail me. He was busy, surrounded by people waiting for orders; and though he caressed me, he was impatient to learn what had brought me down town. I was horribly embarrassed, and stammered, not knowing how to begin. Then he laughed and said: 'It is money, I know,' and without waiting for an answer, wrote me a big check and put it into my hand and I was out of his office. I cashed the check, and in my turn

thrust the money into the hand of the first shabby-looking woman I met on the street. That night I sobbed my heart out, but it ended my hopes.”

Tears were in the eyes of the invalid, and Stephana, realizing that she was making her friend suffer, cried: —

“Don’t do that, dear. I really have nothing to complain of. Think of the girls in the world who have to work all day long without air or sunshine, and who have nothing to look forward to. I have everything a hundred times over — and some day I shall be a princess or duchess, and my servants will say, ‘Your Grace,’ or something equally euphonious. After all, I have much more in common with European men than with those of my own race. They know how to talk of things which interest us women. They love music, and with them I feel a companionship which I do not have for American men. The American men I meet talk business and money. I know nothing of the former, and I only spend the latter. I have been brought up to find my mate in a European man, and I shall do it to please my father.”

She sprang to her feet. “Now I feel better. I have unbottled myself. All bad feelings are gone. I will go home to meet the French duke — and, who knows, perhaps my fate. My stepmother has heard that he has even passed over Beatrice Van Allen, the biggest check-book of us all. If

he offers me his title, I shall feel that it is a little because of me, myself."

"Oh, Stephana! How can any man help loving you? You are so —"

With a spring Stephana was by her side, and putting her hand over her friend's mouth, said reprovingly: —

"Now don't go and make me vain. I overheard a friend of mine say the other day that I was already vain over my horsemanship and my music." At the latter word the girl's face clouded and her hand dropped. "I do not think that I am vain over my music, but I do believe that if I had been a poor girl I could have made something of my life with it. As for my horses, besides you and Maggie, they are my only real friends, — you see in what select company you are. Good-by!"

She stooped and kissed the older woman twice on the cheeks. "Just pray a little for me." And she was gone.

CHAPTER II

“QUI ÉTAIT CE JEUNE HOMME?”

STEPHANA'S car made its way slowly up Fifth Avenue. The wind had somewhat gone down, and it was a cold, crisp day, when the New York sky is blue as Italy's, and the air as bright and stimulating as the aspirations of youth. The New Yorkers — so proud of their city and so fond of leaving it — were all back now: to their mansions, to their homes, to their apartments, and to their boarding-houses. And thousands of outsiders had listened to its lure. All were rushing from place to place, seeking what the city had to offer to their eyes, their ears, their palates, or their purses. Fifth Avenue at this hour presented a spectacle to thrill the heart of any one — to make him ambitious, to make him long to become a part of this exuberant life. Swift automobiles packed the streets, constrained by their own numbers to the slowness of their obsolescent rival, the horse; and the sidewalks were crowded with the best-groomed mass of people in the world.

Stephana saw nothing of all this. Buried in her furs, she allowed Imagination to carry her far from Reality, forgetting that Reality is a stern old

dame who exacts punishment of those who disregard her.

Back in her own boudoir, she stood before the mirror and raised her hands to unfasten her veil. But they dropped to her side as in revery she recalled the gray eyes of the young man who had come to her assistance against its perfidious attack an hour ago. Her lips curled into a smile, and she hummed: —

“ Je voudrais bien savoir
 Qui était ce jeune homme;
 S'il était un seigneur,
 Et comment il se nomme.”

She shook her finger at the reflection in the mirror. “What a romantic goose you are, my young friend; you, who must make a marriage of convenience.”

Still she waited, curiously unwilling to take off her veil. What would happen were she to meet him again? And might she not? To all appearances he belonged to her world.

A knock at the door, and her stepmother came in.

“Why, Stephana! You don't mean to say that you are not dressed yet?”

Her voice, usually modulated with such care, was shrill with disappointment.

“What is the matter with this suit?” Stephana

asked, a spirit of contradiction arising within her, in the presence of her stepmother.

"It is very becoming to you; but it is hardly the gown in which to receive the duke."

"You wish me to put my best foot forward with him?" Stephana asked innocently.

"Y-e-s," Mrs. Brennan answered doubtfully, adding briskly: "You know, Stephana, that your father and I only think of your happiness. We want you to make a very brilliant marriage, such as you have a right to expect."

"They're more brilliant than happy, these marriages."

"But yours must n't be, dear. And you *will* get ready, won't you. It is odd we should never have met the duke before, is n't it? When he was in Newport we were yachting —"

"And entertaining Prince Montignolli."

"You *were* hard on him, dear. He was tremendously in love with you. I was sorry for him when you turned him down."

The smooth tones of the matron's voice made the expression almost academic.

"If I had n't, you would have had to be sorry for *me* some day."

"Well, never mind about the prince. Mrs. Weatherbee-Jones tells me that the duke has already been given to understand that he could have several girls —"

"Fortunes?"

"I wish I could break you of the habit of being so cynical," Mrs. Brennan said in a tone of self-reproach.

"I am not cynical. I only happen to see things as they are."

Her stepmother sighed and did not continue the argument. She had come to believe it a hopeless task to make her stepdaughter see things in the reasonable light in which she herself saw them. She only hoped, through tact, imperceptibly to steer this wayward craft along the course which wisdom knew to be the best.

She glanced up at the long mirror over the mantel-piece and received encouragement from her reflection, clothed in a creation from the rue de la Paix. Certainly it *did* make her look younger. With the enthusiasm it deserved, she asked: —

"How do you like my new gown?"

As Stephana surveyed it, the matron turned slowly around to display all its aspects.

"It is very becoming to you."

"I admit it *is* a bit tight-fitting," Mrs. Brennan said, seating herself gingerly on a straight-backed chair; "but it gives me a certain slenderness, don't you think? By the way, I saw the duke for a few minutes at the Horse Show this afternoon. He's a splendid fellow, and Mrs. Weatherbee-

Jones tells me the men say that he does n't even ask how much money the girls have. It's very gentlemanly of him, is n't it?"

"Perhaps we have misjudged him," Stephana suggested.

"Yes, that is just the way I feel about it," Mrs. Brennan chimed in eagerly.

"He may only be going to write a book about us."

"Stephana, *dear!*"

The girl laughed. "Never mind. Have him a paragon of all the virtues — only I don't care to meet him to-day."

"*What?*"

"Say anything you like — invite him to dinner some time — only don't ask me to meet him to-day."

The girl's eyes were dark with determination. They recalled to Mrs. Brennan's mind the time, just after Stephana had come to live with her, when she had sent away her Irish nurse, Maggie. It had been a long-drawn battle between her and the silent child. For three days the child had not spoken to her, or noticed her in any way, and Mrs. Brennan, to her own surprise, had had a distinct feeling of unrest in the situation. Then Stephana had come and stood before her, and Mrs. Brennan had prepared herself to be very kind and gracious at the child's surrender. "I

shall not eat anything until Maggie comes back," Stephana had said sombrely and walked away. Mrs. Brennan had gasped, and sent for Maggie.

Since then she had never challenged her step-daughter to a direct contest of wills, — she managed better. Even now, when her sense of exasperation at Stephana's obstinacy was almost overpowering, she only pleaded pathetically: —

"Stephana, *dear*, don't you think, since it was prearranged and the hour is here, that you ought to meet him? If you did not feel well enough we had plenty of time to let them know; but now it would be too late even to telephone. I don't think you can possibly refuse to see them."

The girl sighed. The pleasure of her mood had been driven away by the worldly presence of her stepmother. At this instant the cards of the expected guests were brought in.

"Now, Stephana! you see they are here!" Mrs. Brennan's voice was tragic.

"Go down to them, and I'll be with you in a minute," Stephana said contritely. "There is really no need of my changing my gown. I am quite captivating enough in this. I'll just fix my hair a bit."

Mrs. Brennan became radiant. "Yes, do come as you are. You look lovely, anyway."

The matron hastened from the room as fast as her stateliness of manner would permit.

Alone, Stephana fell to musing again, till a soft chime from the clock warned her. She prepared to take off her veil; then, capriciously willful, went down to the drawing-room as she was.

A tall man rose, and at sight of him she caught her breath.

Neither of them made any allusion to having met before, until Mrs. Brennan convoyed Mrs. Weatherbee-Jones into an alcove to show her the latest addition to her collection of fans.

Then Stephana, smiling, said: "We have met before, have n't we? The wind performed the introduction."

"Since I am permitted to remember, yes," he replied.

Their little secret was in sort a bond between them. They talked — of the Horse Show — of casual acquaintances — of the Adirondacks — of only the most ordinary matters. Yet when he was gone Stephana went straight to her room, afraid of being obliged to discuss this man with her stepmother.

CHAPTER III

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DUKE

WHEN Roland François Jean du Plessis de Longtour, duc de Longtour, duc de la Haute Vallée, prince de Taulignac, and duc d'Aronville, was born, his father was still rich; and during his first twenty-two years Roland lived in all the luxury habitual to the well-to-do French aristocrat. When he was a student at Oxford, his father, having run his course, escaped further responsibility in this world by a bullet from a silver-mounted dueling pistol, and Roland found himself the head of a ruined family, as noble as any in France. Though he was still the nominal owner of the hôtel de Longtour in Paris, and of the huge château in Touraine, with its private park, and its thousands of acres of land, both properties were mortgaged up to the hilt. That the creditors did not dispossess the family from both was because they recognized a stronger guarantee of getting their money in the young duke himself than in the forced sale of his estates. They believed that, with his name and his personality, he could make a marriage which would rehabilitate the family fortunes and pay his cred-

itors in full. Moreover, his uncle, the Marquis de Chavonnay, — reputed the shrewdest and richest nobleman in France, — stood by the young man in a manner to hearten his creditors greatly. Even before his father's sudden end, Roland had shown a steadiness and strength of character quite opposite to that displayed by the last few generations of his line. He loved his family with an old-fashioned adoration which made the de Longtour name almost a religion to him. That the last few noble dukes had dragged it in the mud, and dissipated the once enormous fortune, only added to his sense of responsibility.

Roland sold his father's racing stable, leased the mansion in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and took his mother and sisters to the château in Touraine, which had belonged to the family since the fourteenth century. There he plunged into the management of the estate with a fury of concentration which he could have obtained from no hired bailiff. But as year after year passed, it became increasingly clear to him that, strive as he might, and deny himself and his family much of what their position rendered imperative, he could do little more than pay the interest on the enormous debts his father had left behind him: the principal would have to be liquidated, and his sisters' dowries provided in some other way.

After seven years of desperate struggle, Roland

knew that his only hope lay in marrying money. The idea was more distasteful to him than was natural in a country where the *dot* is looked upon as a regular part of the attractions of a marriageable young woman. Yet, pressed by his creditors, and urged by his mother to think of his sisters' dowerless condition, he finally resolved to go to America in search of an heiress. He could have married in France, among the rich bourgeoisie, — a number of advantageous propositions had indeed been made to him, —but he could not bring himself to accept any of these. His pride revolted from the idea of marrying beneath him among his own people, while he could tolerate the idea among foreigners.

In America, with his letters of introduction, and the charm of his grave youth and good looks, he found all doors open to him; and, to his surprise, enjoyed himself, in spite of his sense of responsibility. Or rather, he threw off his cares amid this irresponsible young society, where the stern realities of life seemed not to exist. The notions of luxury which he had brought with him from France were sadly upset by what he saw in Newport cottages, in Adirondack camps, and in New York homes. He lost his sense of proportion, and in bewilderment wondered at times what the Americans would do next to satisfy that craving in their character which demanded

the ever-aspiring skyscraper, the ever-increasing magnificence of their private homes. After they were unable to build any higher, unable to make their homes any more luxurious, what would they do next to show the power of their money?

Still, amid all this evidence of wealth, he did not ask for any woman's hand. He hesitated, reluctant and uncertain. He liked the Americans tremendously, with the usual reservations of the cultivated foreigner. Unlike most foreigners, however, he felt a greater admiration for the men, with their lives of purposeful accomplishment, than he did for the women. He began to fear that he, who had always considered himself advanced in his ideas, was in reality old-fashioned. As he wrote to his cousin, Casimir d'Erouville:—

“American women are superb and wonderful comrades, but they tell nothing to my heart, and they do not stir my imagination. I am afraid that I prefer women with beauty less showy, less positive: women who inspire me with a sense of their dependence rather than of their independence.” He ended his letter abruptly: “But has a beggar like me a right to complain and to choose, when he himself has only his name to offer?”

Then the duke met Stephana Brennan, and to the general surprise of those who previously had entertained him, he asked Mr. Brennan for his

daughter's hand. That he had passed unscathed by batteries of eyes more brilliant than hers, backed up by bank accounts at least as large, hurt the vanity of more than one American beauty.

"I suppose he wants some meek little body he can boss," Bertha Whiting declared, when she heard the news. Bertha was known to be in the market for a title herself, and it was rumored that she would not have been averse to that of Duchesse de Longtour. Nobody would have called her meek.

When the Duc de Longtour asked Mr. Brennan for Stephana's hand, he frankly admitted that he was poor, that his estates had been heavily mortgaged before he came into possession of them, and that he must receive money with his wife, in order to give her the position she was entitled to. In spite of, or it may be because of, his frankness, Mr. Brennan liked — better than he had liked any of his daughter's other suitors — this grave young man, who so ill accorded with the traditional ideas of a voluble Frenchman.

On the day on which the duke made his proposal, Mr. Brennan went to his daughter's boudoir, a cosy nest that had cost enough to fit out an ordinary house. He kissed her, and she glanced up, surprised at something more tender than usual in his manner.

"Stevie," he said abruptly, as he sat down, "would you like to become the Duchess of Longtour?"

At the unexpected question Stephana blushed vividly.

"Yes, father," she answered.

That night the financier sent a long cable dispatch, in cipher, to his Paris bankers; and the inquiries in it were not those which a money-king of America might make concerning the standing of an aristocrat of another country with whom he contemplated a matrimonial alliance; they were the questions a father asks about the man his only daughter is going to marry.

When the reply came from France, a few days later, Mr. Brennan sent a message to the duke, inviting him to call at his house that evening. After the preliminary greetings he at once came to the point, and said that he was willing to accept him for his daughter's husband.

"Would you rather that your lawyers should see me about certain other matters?" Mr. Brennan inquired.

"I have not thought of going to lawyers," the duke answered with hesitation.

"Then perhaps we can settle it ourselves, in a few minutes," Mr. Brennan continued briskly. "I believe firmly that the chances for happiness in marriage are increased if the husband's dignity

is not hurt by having to go to his wife for money. Therefore I intend to settle the same amount on my son-in-law as I shall on my daughter, namely three million dollars. That will be satisfactory?"

"It is very generous," the duke replied in a low tone. "And Mademoiselle Stephana — does she accept me?"

"You may ask her yourself."

Mr. Brennan went up to his daughter's room. To the father his little girl had never looked so lovely as at this moment, and he resented the thought of giving her to another.

"Stevie — you don't care for him more than for your old daddy?" he asked huskily.

She sprang up and threw her arms around his neck. "If you knew how very much I love you, father!"

Stephana's unaccustomed outburst embarrassed him.

"There, there, little girl. You must be made happy. What is the good of all I have, if it can't make my little daughter happy. I am glad that you choose a man whom I like and respect. He is waiting for his answer in my den. Where shall I send him — to one of the drawing-rooms?"

"No, father, to the library, please."

Stephana awaited the man who had asked for her hand in the room where the venerable classics in their handsome bindings, though undimmed

by handling, lent an air of restfulness to the place that was lacking in Mrs. Brennan's sumptuous drawing-rooms copied from French palaces. Stephana did not care for books, yet she was not insensible to their atmosphere when she chose the library for receiving her future husband in.

"Mademoiselle," he said with an air of constraint, "I have your father's consent to ask you if you will trust your happiness to me."

She held out her hand.

He took it, and bending over brought it to his lips.

"My home is a very simple one — an old château in Touraine, with few people in the neighborhood. Before I came to America I could have conceived of no place where a woman might be happier; but now —"

Stephana smiled. "I do not care so much for — for — all the things you have been seeing since you have been in America. My tastes are simple, too."

"Of course we can spend part of the year in Paris — or wherever you wish," he went on. "And the country in Touraine is lovely — if one likes the country."

"I do like the country," she answered.

"I hope I may be able to make you happy." Further than this he made no declaration of love to her, did not even try to keep her hand.

It was an unimpassioned wooing, yet curiously enough it did not give Stephana an impression of indifference. It did not occur to her that he might be marrying her only for money. He had chosen her among many, and men had been in love with her before.

A few days later she was again with Mrs. Ralph. There was that in her manner which suggested to the older woman that she had something to tell her.

"Well, the die is cast," Stephana said, with an air of flippancy that seemed a trifle forced. "I shall be Duchesse de Longtour in three weeks."

Anxiously Mrs. Ralph scrutinized her countenance.

"And is your heart in it, too, my dear?"

"Strange as it may appear, it is. That is, I accepted him because I wanted to. I do not say that I am madly in love with him, — but I can see how I could be if he gave me the chance." And Stephana laughed, with such a note of joyousness in her voice that her friend joined in her laughter.

"Does n't he?" Mrs. Ralph asked slyly.

"Dear, no! He is terribly correct. He addresses me with such formality and true courtesy that I feel like a — a — duchess already. Still I find his reserve not unattractive. He is determined, too. What do you suppose he wants me

to do? To sail for France the same day we are married."

"But, Stephana darling, you are so seasick!"

"Yes, I told him the idea was absurd."

"I should think so — for you."

"And then when I saw how much he wanted it, I meekly said I'd go, if he would promise not to come near me during the voyage." Her eyes twinkled mischievously. "He has a way of making me wish to please him that augurs well for future domestic discipline, don't you think so?"

"You ridiculous goose! You will probably twist him around your little finger."

"Do you know, auntie" (a term of endearment Stephana sometimes used toward Mrs. Ralph), "he has not yet made love to me!" The girl's eyes were big and solemn. "Not a tiny scrap! I am determined, though, he shall say something to me before we leave America."

"If he is half a man —"

"Oh! he is quite that. A man and a half, I should say. Father is very much pleased with him — as pleased as if he had put some big deal through. He keeps on telling me that he may be a duke, but that he is every inch a man. It is n't exactly complimentary to dukes, is it? The trouble is he's — different. But I have a feeling that he likes me, — and I am going to make him fall desperately in love with me, you see if I don't."

CHAPTER IV

AN ITALIAN GARDEN IN MID-WINTER NEW YORK

ON the morning of Stephana's wedding-day, the Spirit of Spring made an incursion against old Winter. The world was bathed in sunshine, and the air caressed those whom often it drove bleakly before it. The newspapers had kept the public posted on all the details of the coming event; and many people thronged the sidewalks from the magnate's mansion to the Cathedral.

It was a kindly disposed crowd that gave an hour of its valuable time to the consummation of an international alliance. The American proletariat does not revel in the marriages of the daughters of the rich from mere curiosity. These girls are their princesses, and they take a royal interest in their disposal. To-day, among those gathered along Fifth Avenue's curb, there were women who forgot, for the moment, the sordidness of their own lives, and prayed that the girl whose lot was so much more exalted might be happy; while among the men there were rough fellows who felt friendly to the duke, because the newspapers, with, characteristic optimism, had asserted that he was in love with his bride.

When the carriage drew up to the awning, and Stephana alighted, she turned to those near her and bent her head, as if indeed she were a princess and they her loyal people. And there is no people more loyal than the Americans to the American Girl. In their eyes she can do no wrong, even when she prefers a man of another nationality for her husband.

Inside the huge Cathedral the Duc de Longtour stood waiting for his bride, flanked by his cousin, Comte Casimir d'Erouville, and the French Ambassador. As he looked down on the vast beflowered and be-ribboned space, the Frenchman's taste was offended by the theatricalness of the display. The sacredness of the ceremony seemed to him lost in the elaborate preparations for it.

Music filled the enormous edifice, and flower-girls preceded the bridesmaids toward the altar. The scene seemed to him more fantastic than real. Then he caught sight of Stephana on the arm of her father. She was not wearing heavy satins and laces, but a filmy material in which she appeared very ethereal and apart from the ostentation about her, and to Roland the sacredness of the day returned with her entrance.

But if his taste was offended by the ceremony in the Cathedral, it encountered a still ruder shock on his return to his bride's home.

The lower floor of the Brennan mansion had been closed since the day of Stephana's engagement. It opened to receive the party returning from the Cathedral, and Roland drew a deep breath of amazement on entering it. The whole first floor had been transformed into an Italian garden, where flowers grew in abundance, and fountains threw their spray into the air. Under pergolas the wedding feast was spread on little tables, and a balcony ran around the high ball-room. The transformation was so complete that Roland had almost to rub his eyes to assure himself that he was not the subject of some delightful hallucination.

"Is n't it a pretty idea?" Mrs. Brennan said to him confidentially.

"It is wonderful, madame," he answered soberly.

He had read in the newspapers, some days before, that the floral decorations of the church and house would cost a hundred thousand dollars, and had thrown the paper down in disgust; but when he wandered about the marvelous first floor, a feeling of anger possessed him at the sight of such utter prodigality.

"This is the way the French kings acted," he thought. "But at least they left us beautiful palaces and monuments — besides, *we* guillotined them in the end. What will the American people

do to the rich, who waste their money in this fashion?"

He glanced about him to see what impression was made on the guests by this lavishing of gold. Apparently there was no more than is produced upon a spoiled child by another toy. They moved about the fairy scene with light laughter and infantile *insouciance*.

"My father," he thought, "threw away our money; but he was a dissipated man, with no moral character to stop him. These Americans are apparently sane and moral: why do they countenance this monstrous waste of money for the show of one day, when there are people starving for the necessities of life? How many men might this not save from temptation to crime?"

By contrast he recalled the last eight years of his life, spent in trying to save every possible penny to give his mother and sisters the ordinary comforts of life, and to help the poor peasants who were immediately dependent on him.

Roland was not listening to the idle talk on all sides of him. He was conscious that no one was really listening to any one else, and that all seemed more or less bored, even in this fairy-land invented for their delectation. Strains of music came from a hidden orchestra, which music-lovers would have made almost any sacrifices to hear. Yet here it was noticed only by a raising of

the voices, in order that the empty conversations might not be impeded by it.

Stephana's attitude was more of a shock to her husband than anything else. She took it so much as a matter of course that she did not even suspect the strong feelings he might have on the subject. Such things were commonplaces to her, and she moved as simply amid this barbaric splendor as his own mother might have moved about her garden. He felt frightened at the thought of removing this lovely exotic from her surroundings to his château in the depths of Touraine. "What have I to offer her in exchange for this gorgeousness?" he asked himself.

He began to wonder whether, like other American women he had met in Europe, she would never be happy unless she were flitting from Paris to London, to Cannes, to Newport, and to Biarritz, —always in the swing of the fashionable world, outshining queens in her jewelry and her ostentation, and outshone herself only by some newer and richer American millionairess.

Stephana had appealed to the Duc de Longtour as simple and unspoiled, in an atmosphere where such qualities were likely to wither early. Never before had it occurred to him that she, too, was one of those handsome American women who were now ruling the world. It was the quietness of her beauty which had led him to choose her

from the others. He could imagine her gracing the old spacious halls of his ancestors, as he had been unable to imagine any of the other, more flamboyant, beauties, who might have been willing to become Duchesse de Longtour.

As Roland stood amid the magnificence of the Italian garden every one seemed to be out of harmony with him. Even his cousin, d'Erouville, was laughing and enjoying himself, and Roland felt angrier with him than he did with the thoughtless Americans. He cursed his fate, which had sent him here, a beggar, to barter his name for the condescending gold of barbarians. Could he have left the room and returned to France, undoing thereby all that he had accomplished in the last few weeks, he fancied he would have gone; for Roland was half Basque, and the reaction from a line of dissipated forbears; and he felt bitterly on subjects an ordinary, well-to-do young man seldom gives a thought to. There was in his nature a socialistic streak, and he almost hated the rich, because they spent their money as pleased themselves, without thought of the needy outer world.

All this time he had to reply to the good-natured, trivial remarks directed to him. And as if Fate were determined further to worry him, he heard a girl friend of Stephana's ask her if her trunks had already gone to the steamer.

"Only the trunks with my clothes," she replied carelessly. "The rest are to go to-day."

Roland felt himself stiffen. He had seen the trunks that had gone — a van-load — and they were "only her clothes."

At that moment Stephana turned to him. She looked very young and tired in her white gown, which was so girlish and unadorned, compared to those of the guests about her. A great desire swept over him to catch her drooping figure in his arms, and rush out of the gorgeous house, out of the air heavy with the perfume of myriad flowers, and take her to his home, which seemed so unpretentious to him now, though it was one of the famous châteaux of a period renowned for its prodigality.

"I am very tired," she said, looking up at him.

Roland drew her into a bower of clematis. She rested her head against the back of her seat, and closed her eyes.

The announcement that breakfast was ready seemed to permeate the air in some mysterious manner at this instant, and Roland and his bride were dragged from their retirement, with many good-natured jokes at their preference for solitude. The pergolas and the balcony were the scene of the so-called breakfast, and the music changed to light French chansonettes, in honor of the bridegroom. Even Roland at last found

himself yielding to the infection of this atmosphere, from which the idea of want seemed utterly banished.

When the big liner had received the last of its load of human beings, bound for Havre, three thousand miles away, and had lumbered with awkward dignity out into the Hudson, Stephana stood with her husband at the rail until they could no longer recognize the gay faces turned towards them from the pier. She was now alone with the man she had chosen to be her companion, perhaps her master. He was at her side, courteous as ever, yet still with that cool manner which, during their short courtship, had always baffled her. She had never believed it to be the coldness of indifference: it had always seemed to her to cover something she would like to learn.

Slowly she turned and looked at him. The short afternoon was at an end, and the light was waning. She met his gray Basque eyes, and gazed earnestly into them, as if she would discover all the thoughts that lay behind them. What would her life be with him, whom she really knew so little; of whom every one felt the charm, and yet who had been so little like a lover to her? She thought of the distant château to which he was taking her, and of his mother and sisters, who lived with him. Would they be kind

to her? Would they welcome her among them, or would they be cold and courteous, like the head of the family?

Her gaze into his eyes had been a long one, and the duke was smiling at her intensity. Then, before she knew that she was going to, she asked the question which subconsciously had taken possession of her: —

“Why did you marry me?”

At that instant a gust of wind snatched the hat from the duke's head and scurried with it along the deck.

Stephana's question remained unanswered.

CHAPTER V

THE HOME-COMING OF THE NEW CHÂTELAINE

THE voyage was a rough one. At Havre the steamer was in time for the passengers to catch the early morning train for Paris. Knowing that Roland wished to reach his home as soon as possible, Stephana, gathering strength with every minute on land, assured him that she felt strong enough to go on to Touraine the same day.

From the railroad station where they alighted, they still had a drive of several miles to the château de Longtour. They started off rapidly through the dark winter night, a postilion galloping ahead of them. It made Stephana fancy she was back in mediæval times, and the sensation was further strengthened by finding a mass of peasants in their odd garb assembled with torches at the entrance of the park, to welcome their new châtelaine.

France may be a republic, and the French generally satisfied with their form of government, yet in the heart of every peasant there remains the ancient cult of their nobles. So the new Duchesse de Longtour was received with the same honors

as if she had come in the seventeenth century, instead of in the twentieth.

A half-mile inside the gates lay the château itself, lighted up for the duke and his bride. When Stephana entered the large hall, she was met by the dowager duchess and her three daughters, who welcomed her charmingly. Stephana had dreaded this meeting, fearing lest her mother-in-law should be a cold and haughty French woman, with whom she could not be friends. Instead, the woman who took her in her arms was sweet and mother-like, as unmistakably as she was *grande dame*. The oldest girl, Solange, was of the simple and affectionate French type which appears almost childish beside the more self-possessed American. Her appearance of immaturity was increased by her slenderness, until one noticed how well developed her slight figure was. The twins, Valentine and Valérie, stood primly holding large bouquets of roses, looking as if they were illustrations by Boutet de Monvel. With the precision of mechanical toys they curtsied, and then Valentine, carried away by Stephana's beauty, exclaimed: —

“Little sister from across the sea, we love you already as if you were really our sister.”

The sentimental little speech went straight to Stephana's heart, coming as it did from a tot who looked at her with eyes absurdly like those of

Roland. She caught the twelve-year-old in an embrace that sadly ruffled her mechanical-toy-like dignity.

There followed a small supper, the twins obediently going off to bed without a whimper; and then the dowager insisted that her daughter-in-law must retire and rest from her long day's journey. She took Stephana to her room herself, and saw that she wanted for nothing which might conduce to her comfort. Stephana fell into dreamless sleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

The next morning she awoke early, and sprang out of bed without waiting for Maggie. She wished to take a peep into this new world which had become hers. Her rooms were spacious and high of ceiling, and everything in them was a contrast to her former home. At first they had to her an appearance of shabbiness. The furniture spoke of age; and the tapestries which covered the walls of her boudoir were faded; yet there was a certain grandeur about it all which made up for the lack of modern luxury.

She drew back the curtains from the long French windows, and found that they opened on a narrow balcony or cornice, which seemed to run all around the building. No better means of exploration could be desired. She stepped out, and saw stretching away beneath her a wide view of

trim fields and precise patches of forest, while off in the distance she could barely discern the Loire, flowing down the valley in dignified leisure.

Stephana followed the narrow balcony till it rose in a flight of steps, and wound around an old tower. Abruptly it ended. The view from here was different from what it was on the other side, and she was drinking it in, when she heard voices, apparently at a window just beneath her. Before she could make a move, she was frozen into stillness by a sentence about herself; and then another, and another. She shrank back as far as she could on the narrow balcony, not daring to move lest her presence be discovered. A few more words, and the sound of the voice receded from the window.

Stephana, the eager light gone from her eyes, crept around the corner of the tower and down the steps; then swiftly sped to her room. There she sat by the window and stared blankly out at the view that had pleased her so much a few minutes before.

So that was the way her husband's family thought of her! "He has married beneath him. . . . He had to marry for money." And again: "He would be kind to her. . . . He would learn to love her. . . ."

Of course she knew that the Duc de Longtour could not have married her had she been a poor

girl; but somehow, when thus put into words by his sweet-faced mother, the facts were shameful. So *that* was why he had always been so cold and courteous. It had been a mere barter like other international marriages. Stephana cried drearily, in her bridal chamber. Because she loved the man she married, she had never considered her union one of those brilliantly sordid affairs of bargain and sale.

She did not cry long. She pressed her lips resolutely together, and, drying her eyes, viewed the situation with something of the coolness which characterized her father. Two courses were open to her: to leave her husband and enter the ranks of the women who had escaped from the shipwreck of international marriage; or to bear her fate silently, as so many women all over the world were bearing theirs.

There were two women in Stephana: the devout Catholic, who did not believe in divorce, and the American girl, with her unconscious belief in the rights of the individual, be it man or woman. To reinforce the former was her love for her father. She had always known that he wished her to make a brilliant marriage; she had learned at the last that he wished her to make a happy one. She would wound him twice were she to return with failure in both admitted. Added to this was her natural pride, which hated to reveal herself to

the world so easy a prey in the matrimonial game. One may lightly regard divorce, until it comes to one's own hearth. Then it appears a sinister relief for marital unhappiness.

Over and over again Stephana reviewed her forlorn situation. Roland, who — now that he had fallen — she realized had been almost a demi-god to her, was proved to be no better than the worst fortune-hunter. He had asked her to trust her life to him; he had said he hoped to make her happy; but he must have known that he could not make her happy while marrying her solely for her money. To Stephana's uncompromising mind he had become a common deceiver, and she felt overwhelming humiliation that she should have fallen in love with such a one. Into her humiliation came a savage resolve to save what she could of her self-respect. If she could retain her personal freedom out of the wreck of her happiness, she would remain in France. But she must be spared the ignominy of being made love to from a sense of the duty one owes a rich wife. For an hour Stephana sat like a statue. In that hour she seemed to herself to have grown from thoughtless girlhood to hopeless womanhood. Her life was turned to tragedy, and she could not conceive that there would ever be any more happiness for her.

Maggie came in tentatively at the door, not

knowing whether her mistress was awake yet, after her hard journey of the previous day. She noticed Stephana's wan face with displeasure.

"Well, is this the way a doocheess shud be sittin' all forlorn by herself?" she cried cheerfully. "The noble dook, your husband, is waiting to see you."

Maggie had so long breathed the democratic air of America that she could not quite accept titles unhumorously, even while she was impressed by them.

"I am quite ready to receive him," Stephana said, with ominous calm. She went into her boudoir, whither, in a minute, the duke came.

He held out both hands to her — "dutifully beginning to try to love me," she thought scornfully.

"Good-morning, Duc de Longtour," she said, without taking any notice of his hands.

Her head was held high, and there was a hardness in her voice which caused him momentary surprise.

"Will you not give me your hands?" he asked, smiling.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I have already said good-morning."

Roland's mood was too joyous to take offense. "It was not so enthusiastic a greeting as I had expected, on the first morning in your new home. Come!"

His gray eyes danced with sunshine, and even now Stephana found something in her responding to the look in his eyes and to the caressing tones of his voice. She summoned all her womanly pride to her aid, and took a step toward him, intending to tell him on what footing they would have to meet in the future.

Roland misunderstood the movement, and caught her in his arms.

Furiously Stephana tore herself from his embrace, and faced him. Sheer passion made her wordless, at first; then she burst forth: —

“Duc de Longtour, let us have no more scenes like this.”

There could no longer be any doubt that she was in earnest.

“Why, what do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean that we might as well understand each other once and for all.” Stephana’s voice was steady now in a way that surprised even herself. “We both had a duty to perform by our families. You had to meet the financial demands of yours; I had to gratify the social ambitions of mine. You have the money now; I have the title: we are quits. Let us not pretend that there is any more we can give to each other. In that way we shall at least keep our own self-respect.”

She turned carelessly from him with these words, and went to the window. Roland grew

white behind her back. He made a move as if to follow and expostulate with her; then checked the impulse.

Stephana, intensely aware of his every movement, knew that he stood still for quite ten seconds. Then she heard the door of her boudoir open and close, and she was alone.

CHAPTER VI

CORBEILLE DE NOCES

STEPHANA felt a sense of disappointment that Roland had not tried to justify himself, though had he done so she would have scorned his explanation. Still, his silent acquiescence was additional proof that she had read nothing into his mother's words which did not belong there.

She went back into her bedroom, let down her hair, and began brushing it. In her misery she had to find some work for her hands to do. As she was doing up her hair again, Maggie brought in a tray with her breakfast. She set it down on the table with a thump. Stephana knew the thump, and half apologetically turned to her old nurse.

Maggie was glaring at her young mistress in the moral attitude of having her hands on her hips. Stephana's eyes fell before the fiercely disapproving ones of the privileged old servant.

"Shure, and what did you do to him?" she demanded sternly, "as fine a gentleman as iver was a dook." (Maggie spoke as if she were a connoisseur of dukes.) "He came up here as smilin' and happy as a canary burrd, — and then he

came down as if you had hit him in the face wid a brick."

Stephana could not restrain a wan smile at this simile, delivered without the slightest humorous intent.

Maggie's wrath blazed up the brighter at her mistress's smile. "Now what does it all mane? Is it lovers' quarrels you're after havin' the very first minute? an' him perlite to me as if I was a lady of his acquaintance, and as handsome as if he came from County Cork, and was n't a Frenchman at all."

"That will do, Maggie," Stephana said curtly.

In high dudgeon Maggie sulked about the room, while her mistress made a pretense of eating.

"How do you like the maids here?" Stephana asked presently, to mollify the woman who had been more like a foster-mother to her than a maid.

"I have n't sufficient acquaintance with thim to form me opinion of thim," Maggie loftily replied, not relenting too easily. After a time, becoming aware of a certain dejection in the girl's manner, she added of her own accord: "There are precious few of them, for a grand big cha-tow like this. I don't see how they manage it at all, at all. There is only an old woman, who seems to be kind of boss to the rist of them, and the cook, and the maid to her ladyship, and an old man, and

that is all in the house ; and divvle a wan of them can talk a wurrd of any Christian languidge."

"Why, Maggie, I never thought of that. How on earth do you make them understand you?" Stephana was glad to divert the thoughts of her old nurse to other things than the relations between herself and the duke. On her side Maggie was pleased to see her mistress taking an interest in her talk, and she rattled on : —

"This mornin' his lordship was up very early, and whin he saw me, he says to me, 'Maggie,' he says, 'do you know how to talk Frinch?' An' I says to him, 'No, your grace, I have always found that the nobility and gentry of ivery nation could speak English enough to make me understand what they wanted.' 'But the servants?' he says, 'you'll have to learn Frinch to talk to thim.' And I says, 'I'd not demean meself to learn a foreign languidge to talk to thim,' I says; 'I'd rather learn thim all to talk English.' And he laughed, and took me to the big hall, and rang a bell, and the old man came, and his grace spoke to him; and then he went away and came back with all the other servants, and he says, pointin' to the old woman, and smilin' like, 'This here is Pellajee, who was my nurse, whin I was a small boy, just as you were your mistress's. And I love my old nurse,' he says, 'just as much as your mistress loves you, and you two must be good friends.'

Then he told me about the others, an' he talked to thim in Frinch about me, and they all told me some parly-voo, meaning how do you do, I suppose. And I says, 'The same to you,' as perlite as you plaze. An' he smiled again, and says to me: 'Maggie, if ever you get homesick, don't bother your young mistress, but just come to me, and I will see that you are made happy.' And then he said he was glad I was a good Catholic; and that the priest understood a little English. He was a rale grand gintleman to think of me at all," Maggie ended in a burst of enthusiasm.

Maggie was gratified to observe Stephana cheering up a little under the influence of her conversation. "I'm after thinking, that it's not much disagreement there will be between thim and me," she went on conversationally. "I don't know about Pellajee, but François, he's the head man (and the tail man, too) in the house, he's so perlite, an angel from hivin could n't quarrel with him. He bows and says, 'We, we, madame,' if only I look at him. It's his foreign way of makin' me feel I'm part of the family, I suppose."

Before Stephana had finished her breakfast, Pélagie came to ask if the dowager could come to her. The girl dreaded seeing her, after the words she had heard that morning; but she realized that the sooner it was over with the better.

A minute later Madame de Longtour came in,

followed by Pélagie and François, bearing a large carved chest.

“My child,” she said, kissing the unresponsive girl, “I had hoped that you would sleep late, but I hear that you rose early. I wish that you had rested better.”

“I feel very well, thank you,” Stephana answered, wondering that she did not feel more resentment toward this woman. There was a kindliness radiating from her which made it hard to believe she could have said the cruel words Stephana had heard that morning.

“Here is your *corbeille de nocces*, little one,” the dowager went on, pointing to the chest. “Everything in that has belonged to the former Duchesses de Longtour. Some of them have been happy, some not; but we hope that the new duchess will be very happy indeed.”

Stephana was unable to make any reply to these friendly words; but the dowager was so taken up with her subject that she did not notice the girl's manner, or, if she did, attributed it to the stupefaction which a simple young American would feel at coming into possession of the heirlooms of an ancient nobility.

“Here is the coronet, which has belonged to the family since the time of François the First. At his coronation, Marguerite de Valois had it designed for her young friend, the Duchesse de Longtour,

who came from Navarre. Since then it has been worn by all the duchesses on state occasions. Would you like to hear a little more about the history of your house?"

"Yes."

"All those things," the dowager said, indicating the chest with its contents of laces, brocades, and jewelry, "as well as the estate itself, were saved by the Comte d'Aragon, who was the third brother of the Duc de Longtour at the time of the first Revolution. The duke emigrated to England, and with his family suffered the privations which the nobles underwent for the cause of the monarchy. But 'Citoyen Daragon,' as he was known, espoused the cause of the Revolution, took possession of the family property, and saved it from confiscation. The peasants, being with him, and looking upon him as their leader, spared the château the fate which befell most of the other châteaux at that time. Citoyen Daragon and his brother never spoke to each other again, although during the Napoleonic wars the young man was a very good general, and afterwards became one of the great chamberlains of the usurper, who was anxious to surround himself with such members of the nobility as remained faithful to France. Citoyen Daragon became again Comte d'Aragon, and turned out to be as good a business man in the management of the estate as he was fighter

and courtier. At his death he left everything to his brother, under the one condition that he should return to France and promise never to expatriate himself again, no matter what the fortunes of his country might be. If the Duc de Longtour would not accede to these terms, the estate was to go to his son ; for the count himself never married, in order that the estate might return to the head of the family. It was a great and rich estate then."

The dowager paused, with a sigh. Stephana had been listening with her eyes cast down. At first she had told herself that she was not interested in these details, which only concerned her in so far as her money was a prop to the fallen fortunes of a house forced to stoop to such assistance. But gradually, as she listened, she found her aloofness fading away. Whether she were happy or miserable, she herself had become a part of history. As the Comte d'Aragon had become Citoyen Daragon to save the de Longtour estates from passing out of the hands that had held them since before the time of François the First, so she, Stephana Brennan, had become a means of preventing their falling into the hands of the money-lenders.

"The last three dukes," the dowager continued sadly, "have done their best to impoverish it. When Roland became the head of the family, it

was a great tangle of debts that he found. This is a brief outline of your family, my child."

Madame de Longtour took various pieces of jewelry out of the chest, and told Stephana the story of each. Finally she came to a heavy silver ornament.

"This came to me from my mother," she said. "She was a Basque, of simple origin but of remarkable beauty. My father, the Marquis de Chavonnay, met her while hunting, and married her in a fortnight. I do not remember her well, since she died when I was a little girl; but I will show you her picture, and then you will see from whom Roland inherits his looks and his temperament. She might have been his mother instead of me, so striking is the resemblance. From her, too, he must have inherited his taste for outdoor life, and his clean young blood. My brother, the present Marquis de Chavonnay, adores Roland for his resemblance to my mother. He is older and remembers her well."

The dowager leaned over and caressed Stephana's hair. "Dear child, you have married the best Duc de Longtour that has ever lived. I do not say so because he is my son; but I have known the men of this family, and the history of the dead ones." Her voice broke with emotion. "Never one of them tried as hard as Roland has, since he has been old enough to understand. You will

make him happy, will you not, dear? He is a little difficult to understand, because he is proud and diffident; but you, of all of us, will come to know him best."

Stephana sat silently while the dowager was speaking; and thought bitterly how these words would have appealed to her, had she heard them yesterday instead of to-day. Yet her imagination could not help being affected, and she began to appreciate for the first time the responsibilities that went with the possession of a great name. Roland, Duc de Longtour, could not start to carve out a career as clerk or miner — as the son of a workman might. His life was marked out for him before he was born: he had come into the world with the yoke of great obligations about his neck, and this yoke must now be assumed by his wife, Stephana.

"I do not understand your ways and your point of view," she said, "but if you will help me, I, too, may make a good duchess."

Madame de Longtour drew down the girl's dark head to her own breast, and kissed it.

"I do not see how he can help loving you," she murmured to herself, not realizing that the girl understood the trend of her thoughts, and that a renewed wave of misery and revolt overwhelmed her at the words.

CHAPTER VII

THE DE LONGTOURS AT HOME

STEPHANA went down to luncheon with a certain amount of trepidation. After her reception of her husband in the morning, she feared some awkwardness in their next meeting. His exquisite though formal courtesy, however, prevented any embarrassment in the situation; and to the eyes of his family there was nothing remarkable in a degree of formality between a newly married husband and wife. She found him awaiting her at the foot of the double marble staircase, which was the feature of the hall. Solange, too, was there, and kissed her on both cheeks with affectionate warmth.

In the large dining-room, whose tall windows, reaching almost to the ceiling, looked out upon a marble terrace, the dowager herself conducted her daughter-in-law to the head of the table.

Stephana protested against depriving Roland's mother of her seat, but the dowager laughingly said: "No, my child, this is yours. You are now the Duchesse de Longtour, and I — her mother."

The twins, demure and silent, like all well-bred French children, looked upon Stephana

and her pretty frock with adoring eyes; and finally Valentine — first punctiliously asking permission to speak at table — said enthusiastically:—

“Brother, you wrote us that little sister from across the sea was like a white rose; but *I* think that she is like a whole garden of flowers; for her eyes are like brown pansies, and she has a pink rose in each cheek, and —”

Roland interrupted with his laugh, and turned to his wife, who was blushing furiously at the undiluted compliment: —

“Madame, I must warn you that Valentine is a poet, and if you do not sternly repress her, she will be making poems to you.”

They laughed, and the incident helped to remove whatever constraint there was in the situation for Stephana.

After luncheon, the curé called, bringing a friend with him, to pay his respects to the new duchess. They assembled in the library, which was also the music-room. Solange served the coffee, and took up her embroidery, while all began to discuss politics and public matters with an interest that astonished Stephana. She had never seen people come together for the mere pleasure of exchanging ideas. In the gay American society to which she was accustomed, the conversation was confined to the trivial doings

and scandals of its own particular set, and the discussion of the happenings of the great outer world would have been considered tremendously boring. She was further surprised to find that, although Solange had not seen nearly so much of the world as she herself had, and had lived practically her whole life in the depths of Touraine, she was quite well informed on literary and political topics, and could take an intelligent part in the conversation with these cultivated men.

“I,” Stephana reflected with mortification, “can tell the name of our president; but I wonder if there is another thing I know about our political system — except that we are a republic? I *do* know that.”

Yet she found herself included in the conversation with a tact that she could not help admiring. American affairs were touched on several times; and apparently the duke, during his short stay, had observed much that she, in her whole life, had never noticed. He was especially interested in the condition of the poorer classes, as was the curé.

“I — I don’t think we have many poor people in America,” Stephana stammered, when she was appealed to on one point. “Some people are richer than others, that is all.”

After the departure of their visitors, Roland turned to his wife: —

"There is an old custom in our family that when the Duc de Longtour's marriage takes place away from here, there shall be a service in the chapel at nine o'clock on the night after arriving home. Our neighbors and the peasants will wish to welcome you among them. It will be a little fatiguing, but it is the custom."

"I shall not mind it," Stephana answered, "and I shall be very glad to see the people. What must I do to please them? I should like to have them like me."

"I don't think you will have to make any effort for that."

Valentine bounced into the room, at this instant, and cried out: "Oh, brother! may I go with little sister from across the sea? Solange says they are going out for a walk."

Roland turned sternly to her. "Valentine, go out of the room, and come in again quietly, to make your request. Never again enter a room as you did just now."

Without a word the child went from the room, and returned as he had told her to. She walked up to him penitently.

"Please forgive me, brother — and may I go?"

"Yes; but I think you had better not call Stephana 'from across the sea' any more. It might make her homesick for America. Do you

feel any twinges of homesickness?" he asked whimsically.

Stephana shook her head. Indeed, short as was the time she had been here, she already felt as if she had never known real home-feeling before; and the cordial way in which she had been brought into all the interests of the family had done much to banish the feeling of desolation that had overwhelmed her in the morning.

That night at dinner the dowager said: —

"Stephana, you will put on your wedding gown to-night, will you not? It is a bridal service, you know, and we should all so like to see you in it. You must have been beautiful in it — was she not, Roland?"

"She was more than beautiful: she was lovely," he answered.

Just before nine o'clock, Stephana, in her bridal attire, came down the staircase. The curé and the whole family were awaiting her, the servants standing up along the wall.

There was a hush of admiration as she appeared.

"Oh! little sister from — Oh! Oh!" Valentine cried, when she caught sight of her.

The duke stepped forward and gave her his hand. He saw that she was more nervous than she had been on the day of her wedding.

“There will be no keeping Valentine down to prose at all, after this,” he whispered to her.

When the service was over, the nobility and the peasants from leagues around came up to wish her happiness. Then, while the aristocracy went into the château, the peasants betook themselves to the servants’ quarters, where there was as ample provision for their entertainment as there was above for their betters.

The spacious rooms of the château were filled with merry, unassuming French people, of unmistakable breeding; kindly, and frankly curious about Roland’s American bride, who had come to restore the fortunes of his house.

It all became a confused mass of gayety and brightness to Stephana, in which she sometimes forgot that she was not the contented bride she appeared to be, and for a few minutes at a time was happy. It was on a much simpler scale than the entertainments of Mrs. Brennan and her friends, although most of these guests had titles, many of them had wealth, and some of them had names that the world knew of. Throughout the evening there was to Stephana a franker note of enjoyment in the merrymaking than she had ever known.

The reception did not last long. The peasants gave the first signal for departure. Well filled beneath the belt, they assembled in front of the

château and sent up hoarse shouts for the bride and groom.

Roland led Stephana out on the terrace, the guests crowding behind them. She bowed and waved her hand, amid frantic renewals of "*Vive monsieur le duc de Longtour! vive notre belle duchesse!*"

When Stephana returned to the hall, there were tears in her eyes.

The other guests began to drop off next; for most of them had miles to drive to their homes, and country hours prevailed in Touraine.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DUKE'S KISS

STEPHANA'S first day in Touraine was kaleidoscopic in its experiences ; and the emotions which accompanied them were varied and contradictory. At moments it seemed as if she must have dreamed the miserable words she had overheard on the tower. Again, they stood out as the only significant incident of the day. Sleep did not come to her easily that night, and in the crawling hours of the darkness her position presented different tormenting aspects to her imagination. Her husband was an enigma. After her reception of him in the morning, why had he not displayed anger, or at least resentment, toward her ? Throughout the day he had shown only formal courtesy, and almost playful friendliness. Had he then accepted her terms without protest ? He had made her a duchess, and she had endowed him with a fortune : were they indeed quits, and was this the end of her romance ?

Only in the latter part of the night did she fall into an uneasy slumber, which left her unrefreshed, yet ready to arise at the usual hour.

After a cup of coffee for breakfast, she was

sitting listlessly in her boudoir when there came a tap at the door and her husband entered.

"Good-morning, madame la duchesse; I hope you have slept well," he said with imperturbable good-humor.

Stephana felt resentful amazement at his manner; but without waiting for her to give a reply to his greeting, he went on: —

"Would you like to ride this morning? I have to go to an outlying farm, and should be pleased to show you your new domain."

There was a certain whimsicality in his manner, such as one might show a naughty child — or an unreasonable woman. Stephana bit her lip, then turned an unruffled face toward him, as she rose from her chair.

"Thank you, I should like to see my new domain," she said evenly. "It will not take me ten minutes to put on my habit."

They were soon cantering through the odd little village of the de Longtour estate. Roland's eyes brightened when he saw how Stephana rode. It was the one sport, besides fencing, which he had been able to give himself of late years, since it could be made part of his work. The love of horses, which in his father had been gratified with a racing stable and the riotous living that is its frequent accompaniment, in Roland was turned to more useful channels. Oddly enough,

he and Stephana had never touched on the subject of horses, except in the most casual manner.

"You love horses, do you not?" he said, with the involuntary sympathy of horseman to horsewoman.

"More than anything else," she answered.

"I have a good deal of riding to do; you will perhaps like to ride with me sometimes, as I oversee the estate. I have no bailiff, you know."

"But shall you not get one — now?"

The duke's face hardened at the last word.

"No, I think I shall continue the management of things myself, for the present," he replied after a few seconds.

He vouchsafed no further explanation on this day, nor on those that followed.

Stephana, sensitive to all that was passing in her new home, was puzzled to observe that, in so far as she could judge, no change whatsoever was made in their mode of living. Her own horses had come from California, with their English groom; but the groom and Maggie remained the only addition to the staff of servants.

It was a busy household. All its members, except Stephana, had their regular, appointed tasks. The dowager attended to the housekeeping down to its minutest details. To Solange was intrusted the care of the twins, and largely their education. After luncheon there was an hour of

relaxation, when the curé or some other neighbor might drop in for coffee. Roland was present whenever his duties enabled him to be. Then came an hour's walk for the women, rigidly enforced, whatever the weather, except when a long drive was made to pay a call. There was almost military regularity in the conduct of the household, and Stephana soon noticed that the general to whom all matters were ultimately referred was the duke.

In the evening he or Solange usually read aloud, in French or in English. It all appeared comically Vicar-of-Wakefieldian to Stephana at first. Gradually, however, her interest in these arcadian pursuits awoke. Formerly she had often been bored or lonely. In this atmosphere of family affection she was never bored, and hardly ever lonely, even with the gnawing ache in her heart at the relations that existed between herself and her husband. Of him she would have seen little alone, had it not been for the rides she occasionally took with him, as he went about his manifold tasks. She came to look forward to these more and more, and also to take a keen interest in the management of the estate. From her father she had inherited practical business sense, which had lain dormant until now. One or two of her suggestions, tentatively offered, were adopted by Roland, and little by little he

got into the habit of consulting her on the more important matters of business.

Stephana was not an introspective girl. She was blessed with the ability to look at the world objectively. Thus she had escaped the vice of the thoughtful unemployed, who study themselves, their moods, and the world's attitude toward them, until their minds become warped. Nevertheless, in the long gray hours of her first winter in Touraine, she began to know herself as she never had in the whirl of her life in America; and with her self-study came the knowledge that, whether she willed it or not, she could not cease to care for the man to whom she was married. Rather, her love for him grew stronger the more she wished — or tried to wish — that it might stop. At times she even had a sense of physical weakness when he came near her, and it humiliated her in her own esteem to feel that a man who had married her from merely mercenary motives could thus enthrall her. How she now blessed her habitual reserve! She had so long been accustomed to keeping her feelings to herself that it was easier than it might have been to another girl to maintain the cold indifference of manner she was striving for.

On the duke's part there were days when he seemed to want to come to a better understanding. Sometimes she would have a sense of com-

radeship with him that was very dear, until the hateful suspicion would intrude that he was striving dutifully to be kind to her, as part of his side of the bargain.

On one occasion, when he happened to have come to her room to ask her to ride, and when she was especially conscious of his attraction for her, she burst forth petulantly: —

“Pray, why do you struggle so hard to be kind to me?”

“Do I strike you as having to try very hard to be kind to you?” he asked, smiling.

Stephana caught the gleam in his eyes. He was laughing at her. She had become ridiculous to him.

“Do you think it necessary to play the part of a devoted husband for the sake of appearances?” she asked cuttingly. “Let us be natural with each other. After a while people will get used to our way of living, and there will be no further need of pretense.”

The duke flushed; yet after an instant he said gently: —

“I do not ask you to ride with me for the sake of appearances. I thought you liked riding — and it is a pleasure to me to have you with me.”

“And has it never occurred to you that it might not be a pleasure to *me* to be with you?” she asked wildly.

"No, it has not," he admitted. He paced the length of the room twice, his brows knitted. Without looking at her, he went on: "That you might not care for me, I can quite understand; but that you could not even have a friendly feeling for me, I confess I should not have thought possible. I could not have imagined that you would contract a marriage which would do justice neither to your taste nor to your intelligence."

"How about your own marriage?" she asked harshly.

He was silent for some time. "I, at least, like you," he answered in a low tone.

Stephana threw back her head and laughed. "You could bring yourself to love me, too, in time, I dare say. Why not? Frenchmen can love several women for a pastime — why not one for three million dollars? And I, of course," she went on passionately, "would return your love for every one of your pretty titles. Let me see if I can say them all — *Roland du Plessis, duc de Longtour, duc de la Haute Vallée, prince* —"

Roland strode up to his wife, and grasped her in a grip of whose strength he was utterly unconscious.

"You think you may insult me," he said hoarsely, "because of the three million dollars, which spell my ignominy to you. If you were a

man I should kill you, but you are only a woman, and —”

He brought her to him with a force that held her powerless, kissed her full on the lips twice, and flinging her from him, went from the room.

CHAPTER IX

THE DUCHESS BOWS

THE duke's outburst was so sudden, so unexpected, that Stephana stood where he had flung her, stunned. And though he had kissed her, in place of killing her, — had she been a man, — she could not make herself feel angry at the remembrance of his lips on hers. Twice he had kissed her! Had she been unable to turn her head aside before the second one — or had she not wished to? She did not know.

Stephana glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was nearing luncheon time. The thought of going down to the dining-room was unbearable to her. Neither did she wish to cause comment by having her meal sent up to her room. She rang the bell and ordered her horse saddled and brought to the side door, although the weather was misty and threatened rain. Hastily she put on her riding habit. Fortunately she met none of the family, as she hurried downstairs. She mounted, telling the groom he need not accompany her — she was in no mood for explanations or remonstrances — and set off at a gallop. She made for the east, a part of the estate with which she was least acquainted.

The road led over undulating, open country, for two or three miles, and then plunged into a thick forest. Here Stephana brought her horse down to a walk. It was not the stimulus of rapid motion that she desired. There was a dreamy light in her eyes, her hands lay idly in her lap, and the reins hung loose against the sweaty neck of the horse.

The mist became thicker, and stealthily formed itself into raindrops, which perched upon Stephana's habit with unwinking impudence; perched upon the mane of her horse, frosting it like a Santa Claus; and put a silver sheen on every twig of the trees.

Gradually the raindrops came faster and larger, and began at last to sink into the cloth, to run down the dark sides of the bay, and to drop from his foretop into his eyes and make him blink. The air was not cold, and the steam rose from the flanks of the swift-walking horse. Now, from the trees, battalions of raindrops launched themselves from successful ambush upon Stephana. The chill at length began to strike through even the good Scotch cloth of her habit, and she chirruped for a warming-up trot.

The veiled beauty of the landscape entranced her: she felt as if she could go on forever through this fairyland of bare silver trees and soft dropping rain. She had never been so far in this direc-

tion before, and felt the added interest of the explorer.

Of a sudden some sixth sense caused her to turn around. It was a straight stretch of road here, and far behind her she saw a horseman.

An undeserved cut from the whalebone whip descended on the shoulder of the willing horse. Surprised and disgusted, the bay sprang forward. Stephana knew that she was mounted on the best horse in the stable, and she was so far away from the other rider that she could go at what speed she liked without the appearance of flight.

The road curved, and she was alone again. She flew onward, the thorough-blood in her mount alight, and the wind whistling past her ears. She saw a cross-road and swung around into it to the right, the horse barely keeping his feet on the turn.

Again she turned to the right, with a vague idea of working her way home by another road. She came to a by-road leading off into the woods, and there, like a statue, his ears pricked forward, his red nostrils a-quiver, stood the black horse of her husband.

The duke raised his hat; the duchess bowed. Pride would not permit her to run, now that she was fairly trapped. Yet her bow was haughty, and there was none of the dreamy look left in her eyes. It was one thing to smile at the thought of

Roland's kissing her, when she was by herself — quite another to condone it in his presence.

"Are you going back to the château?" he asked politely, cantering up beside her.

"I think so, if this road will lead me there," she replied as formally.

"Your sense of locality has not played you false: this road will take you where you wish to go." There was the glimmer of a smile upon his lips. "I trust that you have enjoyed your ride?"

"I have enjoyed it thus far tremendously."

Roland did not choose to notice the innuendo. "One does become wet, after a while, in the rain," he agreed.

There were no reproaches, no remonstrances at her absenting herself from the midday meal. Stephana half hoped there might be. Then she could assert her independence. Instead, he talked politely, as if she had been a guest to whom he wished to show especial attention; he pointed out bits of view that she might miss, and inquired from time to time concerning her comfort.

As they dismounted, he said, "I am going to Paris to-night, on business."

Stephana felt an unexpected pang of regret at the news. She turned her head away, lest he might discern it on her face.

"Would you mind taking a groom with you when you go riding, while I am gone?" he asked.

“Very well,” Stephana replied meekly, — and for hours afterwards wondered that she had complied so readily with his request, when she had been seeking an excuse for rebellion the whole afternoon.

CHAPTER X

THE HEART OF SOLANGE

AFTER the duke had gone away, a spirit of restfulness gradually descended upon his wife. Stephana seemed to become more completely one of the family. She found a place for herself, also, in the family duties, volunteering to teach the twins English, which the duke had previously done, in a more or less methodic manner, as his other duties permitted. Stephana's comical flounderings along the paths of pedagogy brought her and her pupils very near to each other. The three were more like children, seeking the way of learning together, than like mistress and scholars. The twins were always telling Stephana how Roland conducted the lessons; indeed they felt so strongly responsible for showing Stephana how to teach them correctly, that they often forgot to learn, themselves. Stephana seldom spoke of Roland. She never rebuked the twins, however, when they prattled on about him and his wonderful qualities.

The oldest girl, Solange, became her great companion. Stephana found her a pretty good horsewoman, and became aware that the reason

Solange had not ridden more with her was because there was often no horse to spare. She wondered that additional horses should not have been provided, now that the duke had acquired so much money with her. Tentatively she made inquiries on the subject, but only came against an absolute conviction that whatever Roland did must be right.

Stephana felt very grateful to Solange and to the dowager for never referring to any possible differences between herself and her husband. She knew that they must suspect that they were not like other young married couples; yet they did not in any way show her that they were aware of it. By the whole family she found herself petted in a way she had not known since her old grandmother died. The dowager would often come up at night to make sure she was well tucked in bed, and to try to persuade her to let the windows be lowered at least half-way, in order that the pernicious night air might not have such chance of harming her *mignonne*.

"Roland is just like you," the older woman would sigh, when she was unable to effect a reformation in this respect. "He acquired in England a taste for air which he has never been able to overcome."

It was during these bedtime talks that Stephana learned to say "mamma" to the duke's mother.

The letters from her husband were events in the family, and were usually read aloud. In one of them he mentioned Raoul de Nérac.

"But if Raoul is in Paris, why does he not come to see us?" Valérie asked, interrupting.

Stephana happened to be looking at Solange, and saw the blood fly to her cheeks; and for the rest of the meal the French girl did not raise her eyes from her plate.

Later in the day, in her own room, Stephana took Solange by the shoulders and peered into her eyes.

"Why have you never told me about Raoul?" she demanded, giving her a reproachful little shake.

Again the red flag of shame appeared.

"I — I —" she stammered.

"You — you — what?" Stephana mocked.

"I should like to tell you, if I may," she whispered. "Often I have wanted to, but —"

"Come here!" Stephana led her to a comfortable old sofa, not too near the light; and there they snuggled down with the satisfaction with which two young women enter upon a conversation about a man.

"I — I did not know the way Raoul felt until the Baron le Manoir —"

"And who is he, pray?" Stephana interrupted.

"Oh, he is an old gentleman who asked for my

hand," Solange explained casually. "He had been married twice before and had one son; but he is very rich, and would marry me without any *dot*. Mamma said that in a few years the twins would grow up, and it would be dreadful to have us all unmarried; and she tried to persuade Roland to consent to the marriage; but Roland said I should be happier with some young man, even if it were a *mésalliance* —"

Solange broke off, blushing violently; then hurried on, hoping that Stephana had not noticed: —

"Last spring I went to Paris for a month with my aunt, as I always do, and all the time they were talking about my marriage. My aunt said that it was a great piece of luck considering that I had not a penny, and that I was getting older every day — you know I shall be twenty-two in a few months."

"And what did *you* think about this marriage?" Stephana asked.

Solange dropped her eyes. "I had been very silly, you know, thinking about Raoul de Nérac, whom I had known ever since we were children. But of course I knew that I could never marry him. He had not asked for me, and he was only in the diplomatic corps. He is a viscount, and his title —"

Again Solange broke off abruptly.

Stephana laughed a hard little laugh. "Go

on, my dear. Of course his title will bring him money. There are always girls who want to buy a title."

"Please! please! Stephana, don't speak in that way. I only meant that with his name and position he would naturally marry a rich girl. I was too poor for him."

"Did he know you cared for him?"

Solange looked wide-eyed at Stephana. "I had never said anything to any one of him. I had only been thinking of him."

"I suppose he is very good-looking?" Stephana suggested.

"I think he is, and he was with Roland at Oxford, and Roland says he has fine principles."

"Is he as handsome as Roland?" Stephana asked.

"Oh, no! You know Roland was considered the handsomest man in Paris. They used to call him *le beau et dédaigneux Roland*."

"Why did they call him *dédaigneux*?"

"I suppose because he did not wish to marry the women they proposed to him. The greatest offers were made to him, from the rich *bourgeoisie*. His name is the oldest in France, and the noblest, except royalty. But Raoul's name is old, too; and he could expect money with his wife, as he has very little — enough to live on by himself, but not with a wife. When I was in Paris, he

came, too, and we saw each other at a ball. I was very pretty that night," she added shyly.

Stephana let her arm slip from the back of the sofa around Solange, and gave her a sympathetic hug. "Of course you were. You are always pretty."

Solange blushed. "But not so pretty as you," she said sincerely. "When Roland wrote about you, from America, he said you were the most lovely girl in America, and he was sure we should all love you. We thought —"

Solange was always finding herself in the middle of a sentence she could not finish.

"You thought it was a love-match," Stephana ended scornfully. "You were quite surprised to find it only a *mariage de convenance*."

Solange gazed sadly at the young duchess. "Stephana, dear, mamma does not wish me ever to touch on the subject with you; but she says she is sure everything will come right in the end."

"Don't bother about it," Stephana said, with a manner of extreme carelessness.

"No, I won't, only you — you are so lovely!"

"Tell me about the ball." Stephana dismissed her own affairs from the conversation.

"Oh, yes! That night Raoul danced with me three times, and I felt — I felt — He said to me at last, 'Is it true that you are going to marry the Baron le Manoir?' I said I did not know — that

Roland had not consented, but that my mother and everybody else thought it a good chance. His eyes were so burning, when I said this, that I could not look at them. Then he asked, 'If Roland gives his consent, will you marry him?' By that time I hardly knew what I was saying, but oh! I was so happy when he exclaimed: 'Solange, you are a monster! You know that I love you, and if you marry the baron I will kill myself.'"

Solange hid her face on Stephana's shoulder from pure ecstasy at the remembrance.

"And what did you say to him?"

"I told him I would never, never marry Baron le Manoir, or any one else, now that I knew he loved me. We were *so* happy after that, until Raoul spoke to Roland. He wanted to give up his career, and go with me to some small town in the provinces to live; but Roland said that after the first we should be very unhappy, and that our children would have no chance, and that if Raoul were to give up his career he would soon learn to hate the woman who had made him give it up. And so," Solange ended, "he advised Raoul to go back to his work and forget me."

"The brute!" Stephana muttered.

Solange drew back from her. "Roland knows the world better than we do," she said severely. "He said it was better to live without one's ideal

than to see that ideal crumble to pieces. But I became quite ill, and was in bed for weeks. Roland came every day and sat by my bedside and told me I must be brave and get well. He said we could never tell how things were going to turn out — and what he said was true.”

Stephana was sitting with her head on her hand. Her eyes were on the floor, and she was glad she did not have to look at Solange at this moment. It must have been just after this illness that Roland had come to America for a rich wife. She felt a spasm of hatred for the girl whose love-affair had been the innocent cause of her own tragedy.

With an effort she managed to crush down the feelings which she knew to be unjust to Solange. “And now, I suppose, your marriage is all arranged?” she asked.

“I — I hope it soon will be,” Solange said, rosy with happiness. “There is a chance for Raoul to get a very good post in Peking, if he marries a girl who can help him to keep up the position.”

“Is that why Roland went to Paris?”

“He did not say. I hope it is.”

“And I will give you your wedding, dear, and your trousseau,” Stephana exclaimed, making amends for the unkind thoughts she had harbored against her.

There was a knock at the door, and Valérie came in to say that her mother wished to see Solange.

The two girls went downstairs. They found the dowager holding a letter in her hand, and looking troubled.

Solange grew pale. "Is anything the matter, mamma?"

"I have just had a letter from Roland, and he incloses one to you. You had better take it to your room to read."

She drew her daughter to her and kissed her, and the girl, as if walking in her sleep, went from the room with the letter in her hand.

Stephana turned to the dowager.

"There is some trouble about Solange: what is it?"

The older woman sighed. "It is hard to understand, but I suppose Roland has his reasons."

"Oh, bother Roland!" Stephana cried. "Has the earth got to revolve around his wishes?"

"I think when you reflect on what you have just said you will see how wrong it is," the dowager said with stern reproof.

Stephana burst into a peal of hysterical laughter, and hurried out into the garden, fearing lest tears should follow the laughter.

The dowager looked after her with troubled eyes. "I had hoped they would grow together,"

she murmured, shaking her head sadly, "but I do not know —" She joined her delicate hands together and looked upward. "*Mon Dieu, ayez pitié d'elle — et de lui!*" she prayed. "But I must go out to her. She must not think I criticise her. She must be made happy among us."

CHAPTER XI

VALENTINE'S INDISCRETIONS

"OH! mamma, Solange is crying so hard in her room!" Valérie sobbed, half an hour later, running out to where the dowager and Stephana were walking in the garden. "She says she wants to *die!*"

The dowager took the child by the shoulder and gave her a little shake.

"I will go up to Solange, but you must not carry on in this way."

"May I know what the trouble is?" Stephana asked. During their walk together they had touched only on casual topics.

"*Mignonne*, we had better wait till Roland comes."

Stephana went to her room, feeling herself for the first time an outsider. With moodily rebellious eyes she stood by the long window and looked out into the dusk.

"I suppose," she mused, "we get what we deserve in life. I never made myself a part of my stepmother's household, and I shall never be a part of my husband's. I ought to have been satis-

fied with the crumbs of love, instead of wanting a whole loaf — and getting nothing.”

She stood thus with wide, staring eyes, and unhappy thoughts, until the door flew open and Valentine rushed in, then stopped with equal suddenness.

“Oh! *mon Dieu!* if Roland were here, I should have to go out and come in again like a lady.”

Stephana laughed at the too-late remembered propriety.

“Little sister, would you like to have me go out, and come in again as I should?”

“I don’t mind it; but why don’t you come in the right way the first time, to save yourself trouble?”

“Solange and Valérie always do naturally what Roland wants,” Valentine explained ruefully, “but I can’t. However, I think Solange is now actually angry at our brother. I was in her room, just now, and she was crying like anything, and saying that Roland was cruel — Oh!” Valentine clapped her hand tightly over her mouth, then continued through her fingers: “But I must not speak of Solange, mamma says.”

For three seconds Valentine maintained a rigid silence, scrutinizing, the while, the face of her brother’s wife. Something in the latter’s eyes seemed to encourage her; for she asked hopefully: —

"Little sister, do you find that by nature you always disobey before you stop to think?"

"I'm afraid it *is* the natural way," Stephana admitted.

"I am so *glad* to hear you say that," Valentine replied earnestly. "When you first came into the house, I just felt that we were alike. That's why I loved you so — and also because you were very beautiful."

Valentine clasped her little hands over her heart and gazed scrutinizingly at Stephana. In the dusk the child's eyes looked more than ever like her brother's, and Stephana leaned forward and kissed them.

"Casimir d'Érouville sent Valérie and me each a new doll, to-day," Valentine went on. "I was ever so glad to get it — only poor Solange is so miserable about her *mar* —" The little hand was clapped over her mouth again. "*Please*, Stephana, don't let me talk. I just came to ask you if you would come to supper with us, — I mean, will you come and *sit* with us? Mamma is with Solange, and Valérie is crying because Solange is. She says I am cruel to think of supper and my new doll, when poor Solange says she is going to die. Valérie is a little *too* good, don't you think so? Besides, mamma says Roland will make everything right in the end, and that is a great comfort to know."

"You think your brother can set the whole world right, don't you?"

"You asked that in such a funny way — as if you didn't think so."

"Then you do?"

"He always has, when he said he would."

Pélagie knocked at the door, and came in. "Mademoiselle Valentine, your supper is ready. You ought to have been downstairs ten minutes ago."

"I am sorry, Pélagie, — I kept her talking," Stephana said, vaguely conscious that Roland's old nurse was not very cordial to her.

"If madame la duchesse kept her, it is excusable; but monsieur le duc says that when the children are late they are to have only a half portion of dessert."

"Will you forgive her this time, since it was my fault?"

"If madame la duchesse wishes me to."

Stephana went down and stayed with the little ones during their supper. At her own dinner, later, Solange did not appear. Afterwards, when the dowager was hearing the twins say their prayers, Stephana slipped up to Solange's room, guiltily feeling that if the dowager knew of it she would raise objections. She found Solange with her face swollen with weeping, and her hands feverish and hot. Stephana knelt by her bedside.

"Solange, I wish you would tell me what the matter is," she urged.

Solange's tears started anew at the sympathy. "Mamma does not want me to," she wailed.

"I don't see why you don't tell me, anyway. It's hard lines, Solange, to treat me as if I were a stranger, and you *know* I shall be told sooner or later."

"Perhaps you will misunderstand Roland and call him names — I did, myself, this afternoon."

"If I promise to think of him as a demigod, will you tell me?"

"You are laughing at me now," the girl sobbed from her pillow.

"Well, tell me, does Raoul want to break his engagement?"

"No! no! how can you think so evil of him! It is Roland who says he cannot yet give me a dowry. (He was to have given me a million francs, you know.) He says now that we must wait — and Raoul go back to his old position. And, oh! I am not even to see Raoul now, and he is losing such a good opportunity in Pekin — and I don't know if I shall *ever* be married!" — with a fresh outburst of tears.

"A million francs," Stephana said to herself; "that's less than two hundred thousand dollars. Listen, Solange, stop crying and get up and send a telegram to Raoul to come here at once. I will

give you your dowry and your trousseau, and you can be married whenever you want to."

"*You* will give me a — a million francs?" She looked at Stephana as if she thought her suddenly demented.

"Of course I will. My father gave me enough so that I can easily do it. It may bring me luck to make you happy," she ended lightly.

"*You darling!* You very best of sisters!" Solange was laughing and crying and hugging Stephana, almost beside herself with joy, when the dowager came into the room.

"What is all this, my children?" she asked.

"Oh, mamma! I — she says she will — And I am to telegraph Raoul —"

"Solange has told me all about it," Stephana interrupted, "and I am going to give her her dowry. I made her tell me," she added.

The dowager looked at her daughter reproachfully. "You ought not to have disobeyed."

"Really, mamma," Stephana protested, "is it fair that I should not be trusted?"

"My child, it is very kind of you; but Roland is the head of the family, and it was his desire that you should not know. I explained this to Solange; I am sorry she did not respect the wishes of her brother."

"Well, I am glad she did n't, because now I can make it all right," Stephana said stubbornly.

The dowager shook her head. "It is very kind of you, but I cannot let Solange accept the money unless Roland approves. He has made great sacrifices for us, and the least we can do is to consult his wishes."

"Part of his great sacrifice in making a *mésalliance* was to give a dowry to Solange, was it not?" Stephana asked hotly.

"*Stephana!*" the dowager cried in horror, "you must not speak like this. You are the Duchesse de Longtour, and the Duchesse de Longtour is above criticism. Neither must you call Roland du Plessis's marriage a *mésalliance*. The Duc de Longtour makes his wife his equal."

Stephana shrugged her shoulders scornfully. "If he had married into your nobility, there would not have been this talk of his making sacrifices."

"I am sure I could never have loved any one else better than I do you." The dowager took a step nearer her, and held out her hand appealingly. "Have I made you feel all this?"

"Not by your manner — but I know you think it," Stephana retorted.

The older woman shook her head, tears in her eyes. "My own mother was a simple Basque, and we were very proud of her. She made a dignified and lovely marquise — better than most of the noblest born. It is what a woman *makes* of

her position that counts to her husband, to her children, and to the society into which she is called."

She came up to Stephana and caressed the cheeks flaming with rebellion.

"You will know all this better when you have been here a little longer," she said gently.

CHAPTER XII

THE DUKE AS CREDITOR

THE dowager wrote her son, that night, telling him of Stephana's offer. Two days later he arrived at his home, unexpectedly. Valentine ran up to Stephana with the news.

"And whom do you suppose he has brought with him?" she demanded.

"Raoul?" Stephana guessed.

"No, much nicer than that. He has brought our cousin, Casimir d'Érouville, who has just come back from America. He is Roland's best friend, and he sent us our new dolls, the other day. Oh! I forgot, you know him, don't you? He went with Roland to help him be married to you."

"Yes, I know him," Stephana smiled. "And his services were very valuable, I assure you."

"He lives only two hours by train from here. I wish he lived nearer still, don't you? It does n't really matter, though, because he stays here as much as he does at his home. He is not a bit like his brother, Ferdinand de Tournelles."

"I did not know Casimir had a brother," Stephana said absentmindedly.

"He's not exactly a brother — he's only a half-brother. You will see him some day. He and Casimir don't like each other very much, I think. But he is a great friend of Robert de Bris-sac — he's another cousin, you know. You will like Robert, he is so jolly, and — and bubbling." She dropped her voice mysteriously. "I think he is always in love with some lady."

Stephana laughed; but she wished to see her husband, in order to speak about Solange; and to Valentine's disappointment she was sent off to ask the duke to come to his wife as soon as he could.

A few minutes later he entered the room. "I am sorry you had to send for me," he said. "I should have been here before, but my mother wished to consult me about Solange."

"Won't you sit down?" Stephana found herself unexpectedly glad to see him. "I also wish to speak to you about Solange. I made her tell me all about Raoul and herself, although she did not wish to disobey you. I hope you will not make any objections to my giving her her dowry."

His gaze avoided her as he answered: "It is very kind of you to wish to do this; but I think it is better for her not to be married just now."

"Then it is not the matter of money which prevents the marriage?" she persisted.

"I would rather not say what the reason is."

Stephana clasped her hands nervously together in her lap.

"In name, at least," she began slowly, "I am the Duchesse de Longtour; that is to say, the other member of our partnership. Every question that touches your family touches me. Don't you think it only fair that I should know and be permitted to discuss the reasons for certain decisions?"

Roland shook his head.

"I am afraid you do not understand France. There is but one head of the family here, and that is the man. My mother and sisters accept my decision without discussing it; may I not ask the Duchesse de Longtour to do the same?"

He rose with a certain definiteness in his manner, as if the discussion were to be carried no further. But the whole question of money was so sore a subject to Stephana that she would not permit her desire to help Solange thus cavalierly to be dismissed by one who himself had sufficiently profited by her father's money.

"I thought you married me principally to provide for your sisters' future," she remarked.

An angry red crept into the man's face. His eyes blazed, as she had never seen them before. Then, when Stephana was expecting an outbreak, his expression changed; the lines around his mouth relaxed, and he looked at her with a good-

humor which angered her more than any resentment could have done.

"You have the money, now — why do you refuse to help Solange?" she continued, sneering.

Roland turned, as if to go without answering her. Then he faced her squarely.

"The reason I do not give a dowry to my sister is because I have no money."

"No money!" she gasped. "And may I ask what you have done with the three million dollars for which you sold your title?"

Roland drew a long breath, like one who has laid down a heavy burden.

"I have had every dollar of it put in your name, and I am a poor man as I was before, — but free, madame!" Exultation was in his voice. "You no longer have the right to insult me. If you do" — his eyes gleamed mockingly — "I shall kiss you."

Stephana stood petrified. She could hardly grasp the full sense of his words. Of all the possibilities which she had brooded over, this alone had never occurred to her.

Very slowly, as if on her perfect enunciation depended her comprehension of the situation, she asked: —

"You have given me back all the money?"

"Yes."

"But—did you not come to America to marry money?"

"I did," Roland answered steadily. "It was only after I brought you here and you spoke to me the way you did that I realized the intolerable position a man places himself in who accepts money from a woman having nothing else to give. — Oh! yes, I beg your pardon, you did have insults to give. — That is why I cannot permit any member of my family to take money from you."

Stephana stared at him, still only half comprehending.

"But since you are giving me back my money," she said at length, with a little catch in her voice, "the only decent thing for me to do is to give you back your title."

"Oh, no!" he cried eagerly. "You are no less my wife because you have ceased to be my creditor. I am very glad that I have something to give which you care for. It is a very good title, too," he went on with that gleam in his eyes which she had come to know and to fear; "very old, and very noble. In market value it is really worth more than three millions — but I give it to you for nothing. You are now, madame, in my debt, not I in yours. That is as it should be."

The red now crept into Stephana's cheeks. She gazed at the man before her in wonderment.

"There is always divorce," she stammered.

For an instant the duke became serious. "Divorce?" he repeated. "What have I done that you should seek a divorce? You have prescribed the relations that should be between us, and I have lived up to them. Have I ill-treated you?" The light of mischief danced in his eyes. "Have I beaten you? The only thing you could bring up against me is that I am poor — but I was poor when you married me."

He threw back his head and laughed, a laugh of boyish enjoyment, the first she had ever heard from him. As she stood confused before him, he went on cheerfully: —

"Is n't the title as good as it was guaranteed to be? — the château as old and moth-eaten as it was represented?"

"This is intolerable!" she cried, "intolerable!"

In a tumult of feeling she walked up and down the room. The duke watched her. Once he made a move as if to go to her; then stopped and remained where he was.

At last she turned to him.

"What do you expect me to do?" she asked.

"Do? Why, nothing, except to come down and see Casimir d'Érouville, who is impatiently awaiting you. If you do not make haste, he will think he is not welcome. I had some difficulty, as it was, in persuading him that he would not be *de trop* — in our honeymoon."

Again his eyes laughed at her, and Stephana hated him. But she felt at the end of her tether; the emotions she had gone through had worn her out.

“Very well, monsieur, I will come down in a few minutes.”

“Thank you, madame.” He bowed deferentially. “Also I may mention that Solange’s fiancé, Raoul de Nérac, will be here to-morrow, to stay a few days.”

CHAPTER XIII

DE BRISSAC SEEKS ASSISTANCE

STEPHANA was left in a conflict of varied emotions. The duke had given back the money for which he had married her, yet he would not let her relinquish the title, would not let her set him free to marry some one who had more to give than money alone. She could not help smiling as she recalled his recommendations of the title and the château. She owed him all now, and he owed her nothing. The position of debtor had a strange sweetness that that of creditor had never possessed.

The perplexed thoughts which assailed her did not delay her dressing, and Maggie found her most exacting about her appearance. Nature had favored Stephana above the average, and when to her natural attractions she added those provided by a French dressmaker, the result was one to give joy to the heart of man.

So Casimir thought, when she came down to welcome him in the library, where he was holding the twins enthralled with descriptions of America. To Stephana he seemed like an old friend in a foreign country. She liked the young fellow, with

his quick, boyish movements, and the beard of respectability with which Frenchmen disguise their youth.

The poor, faithful twins were utterly obliterated from Casimir's mind. He sprang up with the *empressement* of the men of his race, which makes a woman feel, for the moment, that she is of more importance to him than all else in the world. He grasped both of Stephana's hands, and, almost dropping on his knees, kissed the finger-tips first of one hand and then of the other.

"And how do we find Touraine?" he inquired gayly.

"Delightful."

"Not homesick for the — what do you call them — sky-seekers of New York?"

"No," Stephana smiled, "I did n't live in a sky-scraper."

"Ah yes, 'sky-scraper' — scrape the sky, I remember now. Perhaps to you the tall Roland, he scrapes the sky?"

Roland was just entering the room. "Considering you are addressing a bride, you are almost impertinent," he said, coming up and laying an affectionate hand on Casimir's shoulder. "But tell them of the sky-scraping you have been doing yourself."

"Ah! the Mount Vashington — in winter! I am a great mountain-climber," he explained

simply to Stephana. "No mountain so high and so fierce that it will not yield to me. That and the skating — they are my passions. But in winter I have not done much climbing. Then I hear of Mount Vashington, named for him you call the parent of his country, and I say to myself, 'Casimir, *en avant!*' — what is it your great poet Longfellow has said — 'Excelsior!' and I hire guides, and I climb. Ah, it was difficult. A heart not resolute would have turned back twenty times — but I do not turn back. I reach the top! I stand on the summit! And then, truly, I feel like singing your national anthem, 'It Will Be Very Warm in the City this Evening.'"

Stephana laughed, and Casimir joined in with her, taking it as a compliment to his powers of narration.

"And then the *patinage*, the skating! That mammoth river, the Hudson — what an expanse of ice I stamped upon! At New York — no! The commerce decrees that the ice shall not make solid the river. Ferry-boats plunge through it like mad bulls, bellowing at each other. But higher up, Vest Point, Peekskin — what is it? — Peekskill, there the ice permits even boats on skates to fly over it with the speed of a shaft of light. It was there that I raised my cap from my head and whistled your other national anthem, 'The Flag with the Stars Sprinkled All Over It.'"

With every wonder related, the eyes of the twins grew bigger and rounder, and it was really tragic when dinner was announced and they had to be torn away from their hero.

The dinner itself was a merry meal: Solange was so radiant at the thought that Raoul would soon be with her, and Casimir from the mere joy of living, that they swept Roland and Stephana along with them on the current of their good spirits. Just as they were finishing the meal, there was the sound of wheels on the driveway, and a few minutes later François brought his master a card.

Roland raised one eyebrow as he glanced at it. "My interesting cousin, Robert," he said, glancing at Casimir.

"De Brissac?" asked the dowager.

"Yes."

"Is he in any new trouble?" she asked anxiously.

"There was not a very pretty story in circulation in Paris about him. I did not have time to find out the truth of it. I knew we should hear from him soon enough, if it were true," he said dryly.

The dowager turned to Stephana. "The Comte de Brissac is my only brother's only son. He should have been the first to pay his respects to you; but," she shrugged her shoulders, "he appears, usually, when he wishes some help."

De Brissac, however, had anything except the air of a suppliant, when he burst in upon them at this juncture, not waiting for the return of François.

“My dear aunt, and Solange!” he cried, kissing them impetuously on both cheeks. “And this is my new cousin from America, is it not?” He held out both hands to Stephana; and only a certain reserve on her part prevented her, too, receiving the cousinly embrace.

“Ah! how I am punished for not having come before!” he went on, with a look of frank admiration, which wandered with equal satisfaction from Stephana to the reflection of his own small-waisted figure in the mirror set in the door. He twisted his mustache with a white hand elegantly jeweled.

“You will stay and smoke a cigarette with us, Robert,” Roland suggested, as the ladies were leaving the dining-room.

De Brissac looked with some longing after those with whom he would rather have gone; but there was that in the tone of the Duc de Longtour which arrested him.

“I am no great smoker, as you know, but I shall be charmed to be with you — though it is hard to tear one’s self away from so charming a new-found cousin,” with a bow to Stephana.

In spite of his gay air, de Brissac gulped down

his liqueur and chewed the end of his cigarette with a nervousness he could not hide. Roland watched him quizzically. Casimir had lost his loquacity, and blew smoke-rings towards the ceiling with entire concentration of purpose. He did not like de Brissac, and did not make much attempt to conceal the fact.

For some minutes de Brissac rattled on with the gossip of the boulevards, until his vivacity gradually weakened under the silence of the other two.

"And how is it you are able to tear yourself away from your beloved Paris?" Roland asked finally. "That is, besides your polite desire to pay your respects to the Duchesse de Longtour?"

"Well — er — to tell the truth —"

"Yes, to tell the truth," Roland murmured.

"You *are* a pleasant host, Roland. If you do not want me to spend a few days with you, why —" He half rose.

"Sit down — there's no train till midnight," Roland answered coolly. "As to my wishing you to stay here a few days — it all depends on what caused your abrupt departure from Paris."

De Brissac wriggled uncomfortably in his chair, and glanced at Casimir's silent figure.

The latter rose. "I will join the ladies," he said.

"I say, Roland, you are as bad as my father.

You are always attributing some motive to one's actions," Robert grumbled, when they were alone.

"Does one flop about without motive, like a chicken without a head?" the duke asked.

"No, but you know what I mean. Why do you have to herd me off here by myself, and put me through the catechism, before you will let me go into the drawing-room with the ladies?"

"I heard a story about you the other day, when I was in Paris," Roland said slowly. "I can't say I have much hope that it is wholly untrue."

"There you go again! You 'have n't much hope' that any bad story about me is untrue. You condemn me, without giving me a chance to tell you the truth of the affair."

"I have n't condemned you yet — I'm only holding court," Roland said, with a grim smile. "And even now my ears are awaiting the true version from your lips."

De Brissac was not put at ease by his cousin's assurance. He crossed his legs, and uncrossed them. He stood up and held a cigarette to the flame of a candle with such unsteady fingers that he sat down again with it unlighted, in sheer embarrassment.

Roland watched him with a cynical remnant of affection. Robert was a fellow who won love easily — too easily; and played with it as a child

with toys. He strayed naturally into the lines of least resistance; which certain philosophers tell us all men follow. When he was with Roland, however, there seemed often to be no line of least resistance. Nevertheless, following his instinct, de Brissac turned from an unpleasant to a pleasant subject.

"I declare, Roland, for a grouchy stay-at-home like you, you are a lucky dog. Tell me, are there any more girls in America as attractive as madame la duchesse?"

"You came from Paris to consult me about American women?" Roland asked, with a barely perceptible smile.

De Brissac sprang to his feet. "If you don't believe a word I say, I might as well leave the house at once," he said angrily.

"You might as well tell me now what brought you here — you will tell me sooner or later," Roland replied. "Was what I heard in Paris about you and Madame Valfroy true?"

De Brissac sat down suddenly, all his bluster gone. He was quite pale, and poured himself out a glass of liqueur. He gulped it down, and wiped his damp forehead.

"Roland, I *am* in a bad mix-up," he admitted. "I never meant to get into it. After the last time, I made up my mind to act like a deacon. But Henri Valfroy was such a brute to his wife. She

was miserable, Roland, and I seemed to be able to comfort her. At first I only meant to be friendly, but she was so deuced pretty — and then she said she had always loved me —”

“H’m! She threw herself at your head?”

“How infernally coarse you are, Roland. I did n’t say anything like that. I said — I said —”

He broke off, stammering, his own eyes falling before the clear gaze of his cousin.

“Well, go on, tell me the rest.”

After a pause of sulky silence on the younger man’s part, he continued: —

“She got it into her head that if she left her husband, he would get a divorce and I would marry her. I did my best to persuade her not to. I even stopped going to see her. But this afternoon, when I was in my rooms and had given orders that I was not at home to any one, there was a row outside, and who should force her way in but that woman!”

De Brissac got up from his chair, and paced up and down the dining-room.

“It was terrible. You see I was n’t alone, and I did n’t have time to hide Mademoiselle Stanise — of the Folies-Bergères, you know,” he put in with a certain pride, “who happened to be there. When Madame Valfroy saw Stanise, she seemed to go crazy, and Stanise herself behaved like a

fury. Now I ask you, Roland, would you have known what to do with those two women?"

"Probably not," Roland assented.

"Neither did I," de Brissac agreed eagerly. "Stanise insulted Hélène; and Hélène drew a revolver and shot at Stanise, and at me. I disarmed her — at least, my man did — but Stanise was lying screaming on the floor. She was shot somewhere, I think, and I don't suppose Hélène can go back to Henri Valfroy now; and I must get out of France at once until the thing blows over. I suppose Mademoiselle Stanise will have to be bought off, too."

Roland tried not to show in his face the disgust he felt — less at the incident itself than at the unmanly way de Brissac had met it.

"Why did n't you go out of the country then?" he asked.

"I did n't have the ready money. Besides, I thought I'd come down here and tell you that if you and father would just help me out of this one scrape more, I would promise to settle down and get married at once — on my word I would."

"You would like us to pick out some nice girl for you to honor with your hand, I suppose?"

"Yes! Any one you like — if you'll only make it right with father this time."

Roland smoked on in silence for some time.

He had the strongest inclination to kick his cousin out of the house, — an inclination which he had to curb for the sake of de Brissac's father. Yet with it all there was something appealing about the young scapegrace. Handsome and rich and thoughtless, the temptations of the world had crowded thickly upon one not fitted by nature to turn an austere ear to them. Roland knew, however, that leniency was wasted on his cousin. Too often already had his father forgiven him. There is hope for the prodigal who learns by experience. For him who accepts clemency merely as an earnest of further immunity there is no use in tempering the severity of Fate's reprisals.

"And, by the way," de Brissac broke in on his cousin's thoughts, "if you can let me have a little cash for my present needs, we might as well go in and join the ladies. The evening will be at an end before we see them, if we do not hurry."

"See here, Robert, I have no money to spare, and if I had, I should n't lend it to you. What's more, you are not going to join the ladies, and you are not going to stay here. I will get Casimir to take you to his place, till we can hear from your father."

De Brissac made a wry face. "That mountain-climbing prig! I'd rather go back to Paris and take my chances there."

"You have no choice in the matter," Roland

said coldly. "You will go with Casimir, and I will communicate with your father at once."

It was raining hard when the two passengers took their places in the train. No one else was in their compartment. Robert de Brissac was sulky; d'Érouville was distantly polite. It was not long, however, before de Brissac's disgust at his treatment by the duke made him seek sympathy even from the mountain-climbing prig.

"I'll be hanged if I'll stand this sort of thing from Roland!" he exclaimed.

A non-committal grunt from his companion was the answer.

"Sending me out of the house in the middle of the night, as if I were n't a fit person to associate with. I suppose he was afraid I would make love to his pretty wife."

D'Érouville had been looking out into the blackness of the night. At de Brissac's last words he turned on him.

"If you mention the Duchesse de Longtour again," he said gravely, "I shall give you such a thrashing as you never got before in your life. We have the compartment to ourselves."

An angry gleam came into de Brissac's eyes. He started up. D'Érouville rose with him, a pleasant smile on his lips.

De Brissac sat down again. Mountain-climb-

ing may not commend itself to a refined young aristocrat as a pursuit worth while, yet it makes the muscles unpleasantly strong.

"I would n't make objections to any treatment decent people accorded me, if I were you, de Brissac."

D'Érouville resumed his seat and his occupation of staring into the night.

When they reached the château, it took some time to rouse the servants. They waited in the library while an apartment was being made ready for de Brissac. The latter had not spoken since his disagreement with Casimir in the train. Now he said, with the petulance of a spoiled child: —

"And what am I to do in this God-forsaken place till Roland gets things straightened out?"

D'Érouville indicated the well-filled shelves. "You can improve your mind, if you like."

"What the devil do I want of books? I'm no monk."

"Well, there are plenty of birds to shoot, — though, if I were you, I should n't be seen any more than necessary."

"By the way," de Brissac remarked casually, "can you let me have some money? I'm strapped. I'll give you my note."

Casimir disliked his guest too much to discuss the matter with him. "I will get you some in the morning."

"Might as well give me a check now, while we are talking about it."

D'Érouville went to his desk, wrote a check, and handed it to de Brissac. The latter looked at it and smiled scornfully.

"You must be pretty low in funds to give a fellow a beggarly sum like this. I ought to have asked Roland, but he behaved in such a beastly way to me that I didn't want to, though he must be rolling in money now. By Jove! America's where I will go for a wife. I never thought of it before."

The man came in to say that the Comte de Brissac's rooms were ready for him.

"Well, good-night — or rather, good-morning," de Brissac said airily, waving the check. "I hope you will sleep well."

Casimir de'Érouville did sleep well, after his long day. When he awoke, his man brought him a note. It was from de Brissac, and read: —

I'll be damned if I will let you fellows treat me as if I were a convent girl — and I'll get even with my handsome cousin some day, see if I don't. For the present I am going out of France.

ROBERT DE BRISSAC.

"When did monsieur le comte leave?" d'Érouville asked of his valet.

"He went away at seven this morning, monsieur le comte. He would not have you disturbed."

"And what time is it now, Jules?"

"It is precisely eleven, monsieur le comte."

"Who drove him to the station?"

"Caspar. He is already back."

"Very well, Jules. Have my bath made ready. I shall return to the château de Longtour as soon as I breakfast."

When d'Érouville arrived at the château de Longtour, he found that Roland had already been summoned to Paris by a telegram from the Marquis de Chavonnay, Robert's father. Raoul de Nérac had come, and was with his fiancée in the library, where the dowager was embroidering. Stephana and the twins were out for their evening walk.

CHAPTER XIV

A SIDE-LIGHT ON THE DUKE

DURING the week that the duke was away, Stephana saw a good deal of Casimir d'Érouville; and in her walks and talks with her husband's friend she came to know her husband as she never had before. No matter where the conversation started, it was sure to drift around to Roland before very long. The adoration which, as a small boy, Casimir had conceived for the superior being, four years his senior, had not lessened with time.

Of their boyish adventures he was never tired of telling. There was the occasion when they came upon a drunken peasant beating his wife. He, Casimir, stood and cried, while Roland, the doughty twelve-year-old, flew upon the brute, and beat and kicked him, until in sheer amazement the peasant stopped and doffed his cap to his furious young *seigneur*. Again, the sight of a certain pond among the trees reminded Casimir of the time when the two, against orders, went swimming there, and Casimir was taken with a cramp, and Roland brought him ashore, though

at such cost to himself that at first they thought he would die of exhaustion.

"In one thing, though, I was his superior," Casimir said proudly: "I could look down from great heights and not grow dizzy, while he could not. In everything else — in riding, running, and especially in fencing — he has always been my master. That is how I happened to take up mountain-climbing: I was so pleased to do one thing better than Roland, that I believed I could surpass the whole world at it. And really," he went on with the naïve self-appreciation of the Latin, "there are few such mountain-climbers as I. It has become a passion with me. I return always to the rude caresses of the mountains more enthralled than ever. But I think I should never have taken it up, had it not been for the praise of my steady head which Roland gave me. So you see, that, too, I owe to this good husband of yours."

"Has Roland no faults, then?" Stephana asked.

"My faith, yes. He is proud, so proud that it is a vice. He will never justify himself. Three years ago, in helping his amiable cousin, de Brissac, out of his first serious scrape, he — Well, I can't tell you all the circumstances; but it looked to outsiders as if Roland had done something pretty shabby. De Brissac let it appear so. I

taxed Roland with it, expecting to receive some explanation. Without a word he turned from me, growing white, as he does when angered, and walked from the room. For a fortnight he did not speak — and how my heart suffered from the estrangement!” Casimir exclaimed, with Gallic enjoyment of his own sensations. “In the end, I could stand it no longer. I went to him. ‘Roland, companion of my youth,’ I cried, ‘I cannot thus be separated from you. If you are guilty, I will share the burden of your guilt. Throw yourself upon my bosom! We will be friends together in iniquity, as we have been in innocence.’

“I could hardly breathe from the strength of my emotions; but was Roland moved? No! ‘Don’t be an ass, Casimir,’ he said; ‘you ought to have known that I could n’t do a thing like that.’ He was brutal as one of those Englishmen he went to college with at Oxford. But it did me good. It was like a cold shower-bath. I gasped. I came out of my nightmare. I grasped his hand. I shed tears of joy. Once more he applied to me the epithet ‘ass,’ and then we were friends as we had always been before.”

“You are fonder of him than you are of your brother Ferdinand, are n’t you?” Stephana asked.

Casimir shrugged his shoulders. “Ferdinand has many qualities to make him popular; but I,

who have been brought up with him, know that he has no soul. He seeks only his own pleasure, at no matter what cost to others. Now Roland has a soul one must love. I remember the first time he got an inkling what manner of man his father was. He went straight to him, that he might deny the reports; but the duke, to harden the boy, as he said, admitted everything, with cynical frankness. Roland left the house and for two days could not be found. Then he came back, woebegone and bedraggled, and went to his room. The duchess herself carried up food to him. He would not eat. She sent me to him, and I began to nibble a bun, to try to make him follow my example. At last I succeeded. He had tasted nothing for two days, and had not meant ever to return; 'but that would have been cowardly,' he said to me. 'My mother and sisters will need me. I must not desert them.' The next week he went to England to school. He could not bear to be among boys who knew his father's reputation."

Had the duke wished a special pleader with his wife, he could not have found a better one than his admiring cousin. Once Stephana wondered if Roland could have brought Casimir down for this purpose, but dismissed the suspicion as unworthy.

Word came presently from the duke that his

uncle had been so much affected by his son's misconduct that he had had an attack of heart-failure, and was in a serious condition. The de Brissac affair was even more disgraceful than it had at first appeared. Madame Valfroy had not only seriously wounded the actress, but de Brissac, so far from endeavoring to save the situation, had cut and run at the first sign of trouble. He was now reported to have taken passage on a sailing vessel bound for Smyrna.

Roland was very busy trying to keep the matter out of the newspapers, and taking care of his uncle. He was to bring the Marquis de Chavonnay to Touraine as soon as he was able to be moved.

A few days later, however, the stricken marquis arrived without his nephew, in charge of two trained nurses. The duke had been obliged to stay behind to attend to certain matters not yet completed.

The old Marquis de Chavonnay did not seem so ill as the doctors had declared him to be. The day after his arrival he appeared among the others, and one of the nurses was sent back to Paris.

"Am I to give up and lie all day on my back?" he replied to the remonstrances of his sister. "I have never given up in my life, except when my mutinous heart refused to send the blood through

my veins. Now it is at work as usual, and why should I not be about?"

To Stephana the marquis took an immediate fancy, and the two became inseparable companions. They were *simpatica*, this young American girl and the worn old aristocrat, who maintained so courageous a demeanor, and never referred to his son.

Since her marriage Stephana had not touched the piano. It had been taken for granted by her husband and his family that her accomplishments were those of an outdoor person. Shyness at first had prevented her telling them that she played; and the longer she waited, the harder she found it to volunteer the information. The old marquis had not known her two days before he said to her: —

“Play for me, *petite*.”

She went to the piano, and in the twilight played for him the sad notes which echoed the disappointment of his life, and of hers. One by one the rest of the family came in quietly and sat listening to her. It was as if the flood-gates of her emotions had opened. She could speak through music as she could not in words, and after her long absence from the piano she gave herself up to the luxury of expression through it. She had not even heard the others coming into the room.

At last she stopped. There was a sigh which

seemed to come from every one in the room ; then the cold little hand of Valentine stole into hers.

“It is too sad — too sad!” the marquis said softly, from his chair. “You shall not play to me again, my child.”

But in this the marquis did not speak truth. More and more Stephana came to minister to him, and often, also, she played to him, though never with the self-revelation of the first night. She grew to be almost indispensable to him ; and on her side she had the feeling of contentment which comes to one who, for the first time, finds herself of real necessity in the world.

CHAPTER XV

A TELEGRAM

ROLAND returned to Touraine one evening, looking haggard and weary. He was closeted with his uncle during the better part of the evening. A sense of unhappiness emanated from the murmuring voices upstairs, and the rest of the household, subdued by it, went to bed earlier than usual.

Stephana was not sleepy. She dismissed Maggie, put out her light, and sat by the window, watching the driving clouds and the moon striving for mastery. Through the evergreen trees around the château the wind soughed in fitful gusts.

It may have been a half hour later, when, during a lull in the gusty blowing of the wind, she heard the galloping of a horse's hoofs on the road. There was something portentous in the sound, on a night like this, and she opened the window to make sure she had not been mistaken. A swirl of wind rushed in through the casement and drove her back. A minute later there were hurrying feet in the hall outside.

An undefinable sense of disaster impelled

Stephana to go out into the hall. The duke, with a telegram in his hand, was standing at the open door of his mother's room.

"What is it, my son?" the dowager was saying.

"A cablegram from Malta. Robert's vessel was wrecked there. His body was washed ashore."

The duke looked down at the slip of paper in his hand. "I must go away at once, to-night, to bring the body back to France. I do not know whether I ought to tell my uncle. The physicians said any further shock might be fatal."

He ran his hand through his hair. He was tired, and had been so troubled during the last few days that he could hardly bring his mind to think what would be best to do.

"Yet he must be told to-morrow," he went on wearily, "and it seems cowardly to leave you to —"

"Let me tell him to-morrow," Stephana said quietly.

Her husband had turned instinctively to her.

At this instant the marquis's valet came down the hall.

"Monsieur le duc, my master was restless and could not go to sleep to-night. He wishes me to ask who the messenger was who galloped up here a few minutes ago."

"I will come to him," the duke answered, slipping the telegram into his pocket.

The invalid was sitting up in his bed, his eyes burning in his pale face.

"Well?" he said, his thin lips twitching.

Roland hesitated.

"Out with it, boy. I know well enough there is something. Will the rabble have a fresh feast of scandal in their papers to-morrow?"

There came the sound of sobbing from the doorway.

"What is that?" the marquis demanded sharply.

"It is nothing," Roland answered.

The marquis turned to his valet. "Jules, who is outside?"

The dowager came in, weeping, followed by Stephana.

The invalid looked from one to the other, and then back to the duke. He leaned forward, and spoke softly: —

"Ah! it is not so, then. For once I have wronged him."

Stephana came to the bedside and threw her arms around his neck, her self-control broken by the pathos of his calmness.

He looked down at her with a certain wonder. "Why do you cry, child?" he asked. "There is no more disgrace coming — no more dragging of

my name in the mire — no more dread lest a harlot be presented to me as my daughter — no more fear — no more fear!” He stopped a minute, and then went on quietly: “No more fear — and no more hope that Robert, my little Robert, will at last pull himself together, and give me a few years of happiness before I die.”

He looked off into space, as if he could see to far-off Malta, where lay the poor bruised body that had throbbed with the proudest blood in France — and had not known that *noblesse oblige*. The usually impassive Jules was crying with the others. Only the marquis himself remained in a kind of calm that seemed like the calmness of death itself — the death of all the hopes and fears, that so long had racked his heart.

“And you were afraid to tell me, Roland? You thought the shock would kill me, as the foolish doctors said? Ah! if shocks could kill my tough old frame, I should have been dead long ago. And now you will help him once more? you will bring him home to Brittany, where he was born, and where he used to climb on my knees and tell over the list of his ancestors so proudly? You will do this last service for him?”

The duke nodded, unable to speak.

“And I will be there when he comes. Good-night! You have not much time to prepare for your journey. Good-night!”

Robert de Brissac was laid beside the bones of his ancestors almost in secrecy, on account of the recent scandals connected with his name. His father was present at the interment, as he had said he would be. His nurse and the dowager protested, and threatened him with the doctor.

"The doctor!" he repeated, "what has the doctor to say to me? Men obey physicians when they have something to live for."

The old marquis bore the journey to Brittany remarkably well. When he looked on the dead face of his son, his own had a singular aspect of peace.

"Safe — at last," he said, under his breath.

He shed no tears at the solemn rites for the dead. Afterwards he was carried back to his bed. In the night he died, so quietly that the nurse could not say when it happened, and his wealth and his titles passed to Roland du Plessis, duc de Longtour.

CHAPTER XVI

BY THE LIGHT OF A CANDLE

FROM the time when Robert de Brissac, gay and debonair, and with the moral irresponsibility of some beautiful animal, had come to the château, till now when he and his father were laid to rest in the earth, everything had happened so quickly that Stephana had to persuade herself at times that it was all real.

The dowager came home with a saddened face, yet believing her brother happier than he had been since Robert had grown to manhood. And in spite of her efforts to banish the thought from her mind, she could not entirely still the feeling of satisfaction at knowing that her Roland was again in the position which his forefathers had once held. He himself could not return to the château immediately. Great wealth does not come without bringing fresh cares.

After Stephana had gone to bed that night, there was a light tap on her door, and the dowager came in.

“What is it, mamma? Is anything the matter?” Stephana asked, starting up.

“No, no, dear.”

She sat down on the edge of the bed, and took one of Stephana's hands between hers.

"I have a message for you from my brother." She patted the girl's hand gently. "His last words to me were for you. 'Tell her that all that was to have been Robert's will some day come to her boys. For the sake of an old man who has learned to love her she must teach her sons the history of the de Chavonnay family. *Her* little ones will have to be proud of it now. And I trust and pray that she may succeed where I have failed.' "

The dowager sighed. "His life was a failure, though the world reckoned him among its successes." After a short silence she went on softly: "In some ways my life has not been successful, nor happy; but," and her voice trembled, "I have given Roland to the world."

Her mother's pride gave way again to the thought of the poor man in his gorgeous mausoleum, in far-off Brittany, with his heart broken by the son whose mutilated body rested next his own.

"My poor, poor brother!" she whispered.

Stephana pressed the hands that held hers. There was a lump in her throat. She had become very fond of the broken old marquis — old from disappointments, not from years — during the time he had been at the château. Yet she had a feeling of resentment toward him that the older woman could not suspect.

“He left everything to Roland, did he not?” Stephana asked.

“Yes, Roland is his sole heir,” the dowager replied, almost in a tone of awe. “I cannot help thinking how much better use he will make of the money than Robert would have done.”

Stephana was glad it was dark, that the mother might not read in her face how little she rejoiced in the son's good fortune. To her this was a new barrier between them. When he had given her back her money it was as if the ugly account had been wiped out; and a secret hope had come into her heart of winning him now in the way a woman likes to win a man. The man she had insulted in his poverty had gradually come to be her hero, even while she was trying to persuade herself that she despised him. But now how much more difficult was the situation! She lay awake for hours, after the dowager left her, turning the question over and over in her mind. The old marquis's message recurred to her: “her little ones would have to learn the history of his line,” and she sobbed at the thought that she might never have any children to become what Robert had failed to be. In the darkness of the night her life appeared to her hopelessly entangled; and again there arose bitter resentment against the old marquis for placing one more difficulty in her path.

In the small hours of the night Stephana could

stand the torments of her reflections no longer. She crept from her bed, lighted a candle, and by its flickering light wrote to the man who never wrote to her.

Poor Stephana! In the hushed atmosphere of the sleeping château she poured out her heart to him. She told him all: of the love that had overtaken her when first he looked at her, on the street, in New York; of the belief and trust with which she had become his wife; of the cruel words she had heard from the tower, — and now of her love for him and her faith in him, which surmounted even the remembrance of those words.

Stephana's reserve was gone, and she was permitted to tell all. She was writing now to the husband of her soul, and nothing should remain unsaid between them. She was stiffened with cold when the letter was ended; but comforted, almost happy. Into bed she crept, and the old marquis's message came back to her with a kindlier ring, and the pressure of tiny arms seemed to be about her neck as she fell off into slumber.

In the morning her first thought was of the letter to her husband — the only one she had ever written him. She was still under the influence of the feelings that had swayed her in the night. Her first impulse was to pull the old-fashioned bell-rope and summon Maggie to take the letter

to be posted. Then the second thought, which has wrecked so many good impulses, bade her read it over before sending it.

But the light of the morning is blighting to the dreams of the night. Stephana re-read her letter from end to end, and hot waves of shame coursed over her as she read. What had seemed so natural and right by the dim light of the candle, stared at her as unwomanly by the broad light of day. The night stimulates one side of the imagination, the day another. She, who had seen her husband in one way in the darkness, now could only picture to herself the cool smile of disdain with which he would read her letter, the formal courtesy with which he would answer it.

Slowly, as if walking in her sleep, she put the letter back into its envelope, and again lighted the candle. How feebly it glinted against the power of the sun! Yet it was strong enough to undo in a minute all that it had enabled her to accomplish the night before, in an hour.

She held the letter over the candle. The flame, like a kind little dog, only licked the corner, without hurting it.

Impatiently Stephana drew the sheets from the envelope and presented their edges to the little red flame. Reassured that she meant it to partake of this feast of her heart's blood, the flame sprang up the leaves curling in their agony.

Stephana caught sight of a sentence, as it blackened into oblivion, which brought the blood afresh to her cheeks, and a faint, bitter smile drew down the corners of her mouth as the words turned to ashes.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MARQUIS'S TOAST

THE first direct consequence of Roland's accession to his uncle's wealth was the furtherance of Solange's marriage with Raoul de Nérac. The post in China was still open to him, and he sent his acceptance of it, while Roland wrote to his mother that the wedding would have to take place in two weeks, in order that Raoul and his bride might start for Pekin immediately afterwards.

The preparations for the marriage were to be of the simplest. Only a few of the closest relatives were to be present. Solange tried to look subdued and sad, on account of the recent deaths, but she was unable to keep the radiance from her face. She said to Stephana:—

“Monsieur de Maurierval, who married Cousin Estelle, is coming down in his big touring car, and will bring her and Ferdinand de Tournelles.” Solange looked about her with the air of a conspirator as she added in guarded tones: “Estelle used to be in love with Roland before she married Monsieur de Maurierval.”

“Did Roland love her?” Stephana asked with exaggerated carelessness.

"Oh, no! He might have married her if he had, for she had some *dot*." Solange mentioned it as simply as she would that she had a good figure, or could sing. "But he never cared for her. She has a sister whom we all like better. Her name is Germaine, and she ran away and married an officer in the army. He died in Madagascar a few weeks ago. Estelle was awfully mean to her because she threw herself away on a poor officer."

Stephana was made vaguely unhappy by Solange's gossip. There was so much of her husband's life of which she knew nothing. Solange prattled on, quite unconscious.

"Estelle is never happy unless she has half a dozen men in love with her — fancy Roland standing that! She must be very happy now, though, for she is the rage in Paris. Almost everything *chic* is originated by her; and lots of things are called *à la de Maurienva*. The last time I visited there, I heard nothing except what she did, and what she did n't do. Her husband is immensely wealthy, and there is n't even an American who has clothes like hers."

"Is Ferdinand de Tournelles one of those in love with her?"

"I never heard that he was, though he is with her a great deal. I imagine that he would rather have women fall in love with *him* — and lots of them do. He's considered a great lady-killer.

He used to be in the army, too, only he was n't poor; and his uniform was terribly becoming to him. But he got into some trouble and had to send in his resignation — it was about being cruel to one of the soldiers. I *think* Roland had something to do with it. Ugh! how I don't like him! He makes me shiver. He looks at you and smiles as if — as if he were a snake and you were a bird." Lowering her voice, she confided: "I don't believe that Roland likes him. He's not a bit like his half-brother, Casimir. They say if it had n't been for him, poor Robert would not have been so wild."

"Then why is he coming to your wedding?"

Solange's pretty face was puzzled. "But one cannot be married without one's nearest relatives, even if one does n't like them."

The first of the guests to arrive was a round little old gentleman with twinkling black eyes, who lost his heart to Stephana so quickly that he thought it had never belonged to any one else; and his sister, a prim little lady, with as great capacity for sentimental attachment as her brother. They were followed by others, and by Roland, who had been unable to come sooner.

Stephana was looking forward with interest to the coming of the touring car with Estelle and de Tournelles. It did not arrive until after Stephana had gone up to dress for dinner. News of it came

to her, and added piquancy to her dressing. When a woman is preparing to meet a noted beauty, who has once been in love with her husband, and a cousin, reputed a breaker of ladies' hearts, she would be phlegmatic indeed did her heart not beat a trifle tumultuously, and her desire to look well not betray itself to her maid.

Since coming to Touraine, Stephana had not worn any of her more elaborate gowns. They would have seemed out of place in the simple household she had entered. To-night, however, she called on her wardrobe for its best. She was glad that white had always been her favorite color: she could wear this, under the circumstances, where she might not another. She chose one of those elaborately unadorned gowns which to the masculine eye appear simple and inexpensive. It was not very low at the neck, but left enough bare to suggest the beauty hidden beneath the laces and pearls. The sleeves came to the elbow, and the diaphanous material revealed the upper part of the exquisite arms.

When her toilet was completed, Stephana gave a satisfied little nod as she looked at herself in the mirror. She was still before it when her husband came to take her down to the drawing-room.

A lovely woman, wearing the right frock at the right time, is on her own territory. Stephana

swept Roland a low curtsy, as she saw the quick flame of admiration flare up in his eyes.

"Do you think, monsieur le duc, that your relatives from Paris will be pleased with me?" she asked with mock humility.

"Yes," he answered simply.

He seemed to Stephana taller than ever before; more aloof — more of a duke, in some way. In spite of his tired and preoccupied look, there was an added indefinable air of independence about him.

With eyes averted Stephana asked: "You think it possible that they may believe you married me for myself?"

There was no reply, and presently Stephana glanced up at him. He was looking off into space, one hand behind his back, the other caressing his clean-shaven chin.

She waited for an answer.

"I am ready to go downstairs," she said at last.

Silently he offered her his arm and conducted her to the drawing-room. They had hardly reached it before Estelle de Maurienval came in and rushed up to Stephana.

"My dear cousin, I have been so impatient to meet you!" she exclaimed.

Stephana was dazzled by Madame de Maurienval's beauty. She was dark as the night, and bewitching in her gown of soft terra-cotta. Steph-

ana felt her own assurance suddenly fade before the brilliance of Estelle. Was it possible that her husband should not have married this glorious creature, having had the opportunity?

The Comte de Maurienval was the next to greet Stephana. He was a man of forty-five, who, in spite of every adventitious aid to the preservation of his appearance, betrayed the results of dissipation. His was one of the noble names of great wealth in France. Unfortunately the count had "thrown back" to the maternal side of the house, whence had come his money; and in spite of the environment that had always been his, there was a trace of vulgarity about him which none of the other guests had.

There followed him closely Ferdinand de Tournelles. Stephana was pleasantly disappointed in him. She had expected a kind of villain from the melodrama: instead, a handsome bearded man, whom she could not help finding attractive, was bending over her hand.

The dinner on this night before the wedding was long and somewhat halting. It seemed to pass quickly enough, however, to more than the betrothed pair, sitting self-consciously side by side. Ferdinand was on Stephana's left, and she did not find that he looked at her at all as a snake looks at a bird. Instead, he seemed most pleased with such notice as she vouchsafed him. He was

of an entirely different type from Roland, with whom she had so often heard him compared, in one way or another. He was a regular Parisian, with his carefully pointed beard; and after the quiet weeks in the country she found his talk of the doings of the metropolis — of the plays and operas, and the news of a number of common acquaintances — unexpectedly interesting.

"A friend of yours was speaking to me about you only two days ago," Ferdinand said: "the Princess Montignolli."

"Oh, yes, Bertha Whiting. She was married soon after I was."

"She has not been conserving the roses in her cheeks as you have," he went on, with a look of frank admiration that dyed the roses a deeper red. "They have already sky-rocketed through Rome, the Riviera, and Biarritz; indeed, had not the princess felt the need of spiritual communion with the high priests of the rue de la Paix, I don't doubt that they would be ricochetting about yet."

"And how is Bertha?" Stephana asked.

De Tournelles shrugged his shoulders. "Fortunately one can always cut roses and put them in vases, if they do not bloom naturally. Why should she not be happy? She is a princess — and rich — and married to a man of excellent taste."

"Of excellent taste?" Stephana queried.

"He has never got himself into the newspapers — yet."

The cynicism of the remark struck Stephana unpleasantly, and Ferdinand was quick to notice it.

"Forgive me," he said earnestly. "You must remember that not all our international marriages are like yours. One adopts the common tone in regard to some of them, in spite of one's self."

His gray eyes, like yet unlike Roland's, pleaded so humbly for her forgiveness that she was mollified.

When dinner was at an end they all went back to the vast drawing-room, for coffee and liqueurs, and broke up into small groups, of which the largest was clustered about Solange and Stephana.

A little apart from the rest Estelle and Ferdinand found themselves together.

"You seem uncommonly devoted to our newest cousin," Madame de Maurienvall remarked, lifting her pretty chin, and looking at him with mischief in her black eyes.

"*C'est une beauté des rêves et des songes*," he replied. "I have never seen anything more exquisite in my life. She makes me long for the spring and the country. She suggests mysterious grottoes full of stalactites."

Estelle laughed. "The usual beginning, only

a little more poetic than ordinary. A pity she is the wife of our handsome cousin Roland, is n't it?

"Why?"

"Because you never did have any luck where he was," she answered mockingly.

De Tournelles inhaled a long breath from his cigarette, without a sign of exasperation. He shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Yes, he always did have the luck; though —" He looked meaningly into his companion's eyes — "he did n't always know enough to profit by it."

Madame de Maurienvall was unable to receive his parry with the equanimity with which he had accepted her thrust. She changed color, — her former infatuation for Roland had not been unknown to her relatives, — and for an instant her eyes blazed; then she laughed lightly.

"My dear Ferdinand, why should we quarrel? I admit I began it, therefore I also make the first overtures for peace."

"My dear Estelle, behold me on my knees before you — like the rest of mankind."

The two smoked their cigarettes in silence, the dove of peace hovering over them. Stephana's gay laughter came to them, defending herself against the violent protestations of affection of the middle-aged little cousin of the susceptible heart. Beside her sat Solange, already feeling herself a woman of the world, as she chatted with Raoul,

the curé, and Monsieur de Maurienval — three men at once.

"They will soon be back in their house in the faubourg," de Tournelles observed presently to Estelle.

"Yes, Roland has bought out the tenant, and is having it put in order for the family to come to Paris. You know he does not believe in a conventional period of mourning."

"I wonder if he will learn to spend his money like an aristocrat again? He has lived up here like a peasant so long that he does n't seem to know how to begin. The money of *la belle Américaine* is not much in evidence yet."

"You are wrong. Two new maids and a man arrived yesterday; and a governess is coming for the twins, after the wedding. Solange told me so," Estelle said maliciously.

"Well, he *is* going the pace, is n't he?" Ferdinand sneered. He seemed a different man from what he had been when talking to Stephana. Estelle had not the effect of making him think of mysterious grottoes and stalactites.

The eyes of Madame de Maurienval were upon Stephana, and she asked, after a pause:—

"Does it strike you that *la belle Américaine* looks as the wife of Roland ought to look?"

"And how ought that to be?"

"Radiantly happy, my dear Ferdinand, radi-

antly happy. Watch her some time when her face is in repose, and tell me that her face is not sad."

"She bought him; and naturally he lost his value. One often is disappointed in what one buys. But some one else will be able to console her."

The eyes of the Marquis de Tournelles were not on the girl they were discussing, but on her husband, and there came into them a gleam of such affection as a man may feel who hates another whom he never has had the chance of worsting.

Estelle laughed softly, as she noticed his expression, and blew a whiff of smoke daintily from her lips.

"Did I say we should be friends? — allies rather?"

The mask which good breeding imposes returned to de Tournelles's countenance. He lifted his liqueur glass.

"Here's to the prettiest game in the world — the game of love — of infinite variety — from the white rose to the night-blooming cereus!"

"Very pretty, Ferdinand. I do not wonder that so conscientious an artist as you has his successes."

She drank his toast, and then walked over to Stephana, who at the instant happened to be alone.

"You are a wonderful young person," she exclaimed, sinking down in the seat beside her. "I had heard much of my new cousin from America, but I had not expected a woman who could bowl over a man like our cousin Ferdinand at the first meeting. He has positively not been able to speak of anything except you this evening. It's not what I am used to," she ended, with a little grimace.

"He seems to be very nice," Stephana said, hesitating. "I had heard a great deal about him, but —"

"What you had heard had not entirely prejudiced you in his favor?" Estelle laughed. "You mustn't attach too much weight to what you hear. Ferdinand defies conventions, therefore some people take him to be a monster of iniquity. For my part I like him."

This simple commendation from Madame de Maurienvall did much to remove from Stephana's mind the prejudice it had harbored against de Tournelles. It was natural, she thought, that to those living quietly in the provinces a brilliant worldling like Ferdinand should seem as wicked as the World always appears to the Provinces.

When later in the evening de Tournelles again made his way to Stephana's side, she could find nothing in his manner to which exception might be taken, even though he did not pretend to hide the interest and admiration she inspired in him.

Delicately he indicated to her that she was to him something unattainable, something to be worshiped distantly as a star.

Ferdinand was blessed with a remarkable voice. It was a voice to soothe the affrighted conscience, a voice to give worth to words, if they themselves lacked it. Stephana's heart was hungry for love, and the sympathetic friendship his voice offered her was in some sort balm for the love denied her. Such art as that of Ferdinand had the air of sincerity, a ring like that of truth. His was not the art which betrays itself.

On his part he felt that he was interesting her, that she liked him already. It was enough for the first evening.

His eyes met those of Roland, at the other end of the room. The two men looked at each other with faces that betrayed not the slightest emotion. Thus, under civilization, do men appear who do not love each other.

De Tournelles's eyes did not fall before those of the Duc de Longtour. He was no coward.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR A BIT OF RIBBON

THE simple ceremonies performed by the village *maire* and by the curé, which started Solange and Raoul on their great venture into life, were over. In tearful happiness the girl who had become a sister to Stephana went off on her journey to the other side of the world, and the relatives who had come to the wedding began dropping off one or two at a time. It was a leisurely country. A spring shower decided the party that had come in the touring car to stay a day longer than any of the others except Casimir. Stephana was glad to have them remain, from a variety of reasons. She dreaded the reaction which would come when the household was again alone. It seemed to her that now matters between herself and her husband could not help coming to a head; and she had a nervous dread of facing the crisis. She wished first to feel a little surer of herself — to have an inkling of what the duke's attitude towards her would be under the vastly different conditions in which he now found himself.

Besides all this she took a genuine pleasure in the gay talk of the de Maurienvals and Ferdi-

nand. The spring shower, she felt, had been for them only a welcome pretext. She could see that they liked her and enjoyed staying at the château de Longtour. And in addition to the pleasure she felt in their company, it consoled her pride both to show her husband that what he valued so slightly others appreciated more highly, and to prove to these critical relatives of his that the Duc de Longtour had married more than mere money.

On the morning of the last day of their stay, Stephana came down early, and was greeted, at the foot of the stairs, by Ferdinand, who usually at this hour had not begun his morning nap.

"You are going out into the garden?" he asked eagerly, surveying her with entire approbation, in her white serge walking-suit, whose short skirt showed her trim ankles and shapely feet. "Yes, I knew it. I have been watching that staircase for you as intently as — what shall I say?"

"As a cat watches a hole for a mouse?" Stephana suggested demurely.

"On such a spring morning as this — such a comparison!" he cried reproachfully.

"No, not on such a morning," Stephana assented. "I should have said, 'As the robin watches for the early worm.'"

"You are too bad," Ferdinand laughed. "I do not think I can put my trust in you for similes. Now *I* should have said, 'As a pilgrim in a holy

land watches for a miracle.' I wished to be the first to greet you this morning — I had a superstition about it."

They stepped out into the freshness of the garden, and walked down one of the paths. For the early spring flowers, just beginning to open their blossoms, de Tournelles had no eyes. He looked with increasing pleasure at his companion, noting the graceful moulding of her form, the supple strength of her figure.

"This is the pleasantest time I have ever had in this old château," he said. "I have never before walked here with a pretty woman who might have stepped out of an old painting — if the old masters had painted young women dressed in perfect, present-day taste."

"You expected to find me half Indian — with feathers in my hair, didn't you?" Stephana asked, with the coquetry that Ferdinand awakened in all women to whom he paid attention.

"From the youngest nation one expects children, not adults who might be the result of the most cultivated and oldest civilization, does one not?" he asked gravely.

There was such sincere admiration evident in his speech that Stephana blushed.

"And yet," he went on, "there is about you a freshness that one misses in our women. It is as

if the gods had breathed upon you more recently than upon the rest of us."

Out from the doorway, radiant as a June rose, tripped Estelle de Maurierval. Stephana turned to her, laughing.

"Cousin Ferdinand is trying to turn my American head by intimating that the pagan gods have emigrated to America and have imparted to us their immortal youth."

"I don't know what is the matter with Ferdinand lately," Estelle said anxiously. "Usually he is so indifferent. I believe he considers it his greatest charm. He's terribly spoiled, you know."

"I spoiled — with you to take me down continually! — Impossible!" he protested.

"But since he has been up here," Estelle went on, "he seems as eager to please as any hobbledoy just entering society. I think it must be the effect of —" She hesitated mischievously — "of the country air. He's such a *boulevardier* that country air is dangerous for him as water to a toper."

Casimir came out into the garden. Estelle immediately appropriated him, and presently drew him away out of earshot of the other two.

Ferdinand shot her a grateful glance, as she looked back at him. He found himself eager to talk to Stephana alone, with an eagerness that surprised himself. As he looked into her clear, brown

eyes, like deep pools of water beneath overhanging pine trees, he thought of his cousin.

"He was always lucky. With a wife like this, life might be different, saner, happier."

In all Ferdinand's dealings with women it had been a duel of wits and sense. He knew how to outwit the one, to master the other. But in meeting Stephana it was as if he emerged from crowded artificial gardens, with their overpowering perfume, into a wide, wind-swept country, with the sweetness of cleanliness in the air.

He had known a number of other American women, but none like her. They had been gorgeous creatures, — with and without husbands in the background, — who had seemed to say to him, "Tempt us if you can: you will find that your wiles are of no avail." Still less was she of the satiny, cattish type of Parisian women, who from beneath half-closed eyelids seemed to say, "You may, if you dare — but do you dare?"

Stephana had met him with a candor quite new in his experience. And she thrilled him none the less that she appealed to the highest there was in him. There is no more subtle pandering to the self-love of a man like Ferdinand than such an appeal, with its novelty and its flattering inferences.

Moreover, the higher the type of woman, the greater the interest in playing the game to which

he and Estelle had drunk on the night of their arrival. Not, to do Ferdinand justice, that he had any present intention of conquest; but in the back of his mind there was always the possibility of adventure with any woman who attracted him. And finally, it did not detract from the piquancy of the situation that Stephana was the wife of the cousin between whom and himself there had always existed the dislike which the devious and the straightforward entertain for each other.

From these various reasons it was with lively regret that he went away from the château, with his party, immediately after luncheon, for the trip back to Paris.

Roland, on the contrary, although he had never varied from his rôle of the scrupulously polite host, saw the touring car depart with a feeling of relief. Casimir d'Érouville alone now remained from the outside world. He was to go by the night train, having declined an invitation to join those in the motor.

Instead of finding the situation at all strained, when thus left alone again with her husband,—for Casimir hardly counted as a stranger,—Stephana found the duke gayer, more care-free and joyous than she had ever known him. Several times during the afternoon she gazed at him and wondered if this could be the same man she had known so grave, so reserved, and serious.

He romped about the garden with the twins, joked with Casimir and his mother, and even teased her slyly, once or twice, with a cadence in his voice akin to that of a lover's.

Presently Casimir proposed a fencing bout.

"I have rarely managed to beat your tall husband," he said to Stephana; "but to-day, under the guiding light of your eyes, I feel that I shall succeed."

"Guiding light of Maître Poigneau's good lessons, you mean," Roland retorted, "when you know I have n't had a foil in my hand since I went to America."

"There he goes again, like a Briton, taking every bit of sentimentality out of life. Of course I have been taking lessons of Maître Poigneau — I always do. You'd think Roland would become slow down here hopping clods, would n't you? But this time I think I've got him. Maître Poigneau says I've been making great progress of late!"

"Oh! oh! they're going to fence!" Valérie cried. "Come to the *salle d'armes*, Stephana. It is simply grand to watch them."

The twins grabbed her and dragged her off to the *salle d'armes*, where they took their places in the little balcony, beneath which the two men shortly appeared in fencing costume.

"Give me the ribbon from your throat," Cas-

imir said, looking up at Stephana. "We'll show Roland that sentiment is stronger than his abominable length of arm."

Laughing, Stephana unfastened the slender ribbon from her throat and threw it down to Casimir's outstretched hand. But Roland, with a flick of his blade, caught the ribbon in mid-air, and twisted it about the hilt of his own foil.

"Oh! come now, that's not fair," Casimir expostulated, with real vexation at this *coup de ruban*.

"Slow coach! — with all your lessons from Maître Poigneau. Why did n't you catch it yourself — you were nearer than I? You'll have to fight for it now."

"Under the usual agreement?" Casimir asked.

"The usual agreement," Roland replied. "*En garde!*"

They saluted with all the formality of the dueling field, and the play of steel upon steel began.

Casimir was quick as a cat, and those eyes of his, which were used to looking fearlessly across treacherous crevasses and down sheer descents of thousands of feet, were bright and keen. He handled his blade with the skill that Maître Poigneau, better than any *maître d'armes* in Paris, knew how to impart to an assiduous pupil.

They thrust and parried, attacked and retreated, till Stephana's unaccustomed eyes were

hardly able to follow the blades in their dazzling work. Yet even she could soon see that with the duke fencing was more than an acquired accomplishment — it was a gift of nature fostered by the best instruction. While Casimir sprang forward and back, lunged terrifically, and parried adroitly, Roland seemed almost to stand still by comparison. He fenced so easily that he appeared actually slower than his opponent. It was only when one noticed how Casimir's fierce thrusts slid harmlessly along the duke's blade and always just grazed his body, that one saw that what had the appearance of slowness was in reality a skill so consummate that it foresaw and forestalled all the efforts of his opponent.

For twenty minutes they fenced as hard as if there were no buttons on the ends of the foils, and no masks on their faces. Casimir was really a trifle vexed at Roland for snatching away Stephana's ribbon, and tried every trick and ruse that Maître Poigneau had taught him, but without avail. In the language of the race-track, he was unable to make Roland extend himself.

The twins were in ecstasies. "Roland has promised us that we shall have regular fencing lessons next year," they whispered to Stephana. "He gave us some lessons himself last year; but when he went to America they stopped, and never began again."

As breathlessly interested as the little ones, Stephana watched the contest, fearful lest the ribbon which she had thrown to his antagonist might be lost to Roland. Had she known more of fencing she would not have felt this uneasiness. After one of Casimir's fiercest lunges, his sword flew from his hand and slid along the floor.

"Oh!" cried Valentine, as the duke picked it up and tendered the hilt to Casimir, "did you see that? Roland can always do that when he wishes to. In the winter, gentlemen from a league around used to come here to fence with him, and he could easily beat them all."

Casimir did not give up the match until he was so exhausted that he could not hold up the end of his foil.

The duke, who was hardly more than comfortably warmed up, turned and saluted Stephana.

"Madame la duchesse, it is my duty to inform you that the knight who elected to fight in honor of your beautiful eyes was unable to regain the token he strove for. By right of conquest, therefore, your ribbon becomes my oriflamme."

"Roland, you are superb," Casimir panted. To Stephana he added, when he had somewhat regained his breath: "I ought to tell you, that we do not fence according to the usual rules. He is such a shark at the game that we agree that if I can

make him cry *touché* twice, I am held to be the victor of the bout."

Stephana's eyes were brilliant, and her heart was beating foolishly fast at the little comedy of the contest for her ribbon.

François, who had been hovering around the door for the last ten minutes, pretending that respect for his betters, and not interest in the fencing, was holding him back, now came forward with a telegram on his salver.

The duke read it, and muttered an exclamation of displeasure.

"No bad news, I hope," Stephana said.

"The worst, for me. I shall have to go to Paris at once — perhaps farther, in order that poor Robert de Brissac may rest peacefully in his grave. Well, Casimir, I shall at least have the pleasure of your company to Paris to-night."

The rest of the afternoon was not so gay as the beginning had been. There were the usual last duties to attend to, before the duke could go; and the burden of responsibility which had fallen away, descended upon him again.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GHOSTS OF THE CHÂTEAU

THE old château was metamorphosed on the following day. Solange had flown from her nest forever. The twins were immersed in study under the disciplinarian eyes of their new governess — an excellent if uncompanionable person. The gay guests had migrated like joyous birds of summertime, leaving a bleak winter of solitude behind. A period of bad weather put a stop to neighborhood visiting, and prevented even exercise.

The next two weeks were the quietest of Stephana's life. She missed Solange even more than she had expected to; she missed her occupation teaching the twins, her rides with Roland, and — to her surprise — the glimpse of gay Parisian society she had seen. Her former love of solitude had been that of the person in the midst of everything the world counts interesting. Yet although Stephana found time hanging heavy on her hands, it was not so much the loneliness she minded as Roland's neglect, and her own bitter thoughts. He did not even write to her. A few notes to his mother mentioned that he was very busy, without giving details.

She forgot that he was still only living up to the conditions she herself had laid down. The situation had become curiously reversed by his accession to his uncle's wealth. Where before she had been holding him at arm's length, now he had the appearance of deliberately neglecting her.

Stephana's thoughts drove her restlessly about the old château, and finally even out into the rain. She would roam about for hours with her dogs, or ride hard and fast through the slippery mud. She grew thinner, and her eyes larger, until, except for the proud way in which she held her head, she might have been the original of *Madre Dolorosa*. To her husband she was now nothing except a title-hunter, she thought. She had told him this herself. While she had been able to think of him as a fortune-hunter, and to despise him, it had not mattered. But now he had redeemed himself by giving back the money, while she still held the title. Probably he had the same scorn for her which she had felt for him. She burned with shame, and then illogically grew angry at him for not being able to see that she really loved him and not his title.

To the hurt of his actual neglect was added the knowledge that another woman was witness to her humiliation. Had she been alone she could have gritted her teeth and borne her misery, while making up her mind what course to pursue. It

was his mother's silent sympathy which made each recurring morning more trying. We have lost the animal instinct to go off by ourselves when physically ill or hurt, but we still retain it for our moral suffering.

For herself, the older woman had spent too many years of her life in storm, to complain of mere peace and monotony. But she chafed under the abandonment of the girl whom she had come to love as a daughter, and her vexation against Roland rose steadily. If business called him from Touraine so often, he might at least take his young wife with him. That her faith in him had been absolute till now made her insistent doubts the more torturing. Was it possible that he who had seemed so noble and high-minded in adversity should have another side to display in prosperity? Such things had been, and such alone seemed to her an adequate explanation of his present conduct.

Stephana noticed that the dowager's attitude toward her son had subtly changed. When she had first come to Touraine he had been to his mother a man who could not possibly do anything wrong. Of late she spoke of him less and less, and with an underlying tone of doubt and disapproval.

On the fourteenth day of Roland's absence she came to Stephana's room.

"Dear, will you come to-night to midnight service in the chapel?" she asked.

"Midnight service?" Stephana repeated listlessly. "What is that for?"

"To pray for the repose of the soul of the man who took his life nine years ago to-night." After a silence, she added hesitatingly: "I think Roland will be here."

"Has he written?" Stephana asked, a trace of animation creeping into her voice.

"No, but I think he will come. He has never yet been absent. He cannot have forgotten the day."

The girl noticed again the doubt in the older woman's voice. She rose, moved by a sudden overwhelming wave of misery, and knelt by the dowager's chair.

"Tell me, *maman*, were you happy with your husband?" she asked, her sad dark eyes fixed on the other's face.

The dowager stroked the girl's hair with infinite tenderness. "No, my child, not as happiness is understood by women. I was loved fiercely for a year, to be forgotten for others; then loved again, and again abandoned. A love which is based only on the beauty of a woman cannot last. It is the respect, the trust, the companionship a man gives his wife that make her happy. I never had any of these, because it is not in the

de Longtour blood to give. How can they give what is not in them?"

She spoke with a bitterness less for herself than for the girl kneeling at her side. And Stephana, listening, with her head on the shoulder of her husband's mother, had the feeling that the older woman was preparing her for a life which held little of conjugal happiness.

The rest of the day they spent together, these two unhappy women. In the afternoon the de Longtour mausoleum was opened, and they put flowers upon the coffin of the man who had spent so ill a life. Then they wandered about the gray old mansion together, not knowing just how to pass the time till evening. They spent an hour in the picture-gallery, where the portraits and the names remained of those that once had been men and women of their race.

"We are going about this afternoon as if we were ghosts of those up there," Stephana said with wan jocularity. "Are n't there any ghosts here? It's all the place needs."

"Yes, there are many," the dowager answered. "They are the souls of the duchesses de Longtour, whose hearts have been trampled upon by the men who had promised to cherish them. Among all these beautiful women there are only two that were not made miserable."

As nightfall approached, the dowager sent

Stephana to her room to lie down and rest — as if rest were what she needed. She herself grew ever more dejected as the hours passed: she foresaw for the wife of her son all the misery she herself had endured. And that her Roland might be capable of the evil ways of his father made her meditations bitter indeed.

Immersed in such thoughts Roland found his mother, when he descended from the hired trap which had brought him from the station, and entered her room.

“You here, at last!” she cried; and at the actual sight of him, her heart leaped within her.

“You did not think, my mother, that I could forget the day? I could not reach here earlier.”

He clasped her in his arms, and in that haven all the sorrows of the afternoon disappeared.

“You have been lonely without me?” he asked gayly.

She drew herself partly away from him. “I have had Stephana,” she answered; and demanded with what sternness she could muster: “Roland, what is the meaning of your treatment of her?”

He shook his head. “Let us not discuss it, little mother.”

“But I will not be put off so. You are even more cruel than your father. He gave me at least what love he was capable of. You cannot say

that you have done that. You married her for her fortune — and now abandon her to live as she may. Do you think that your title is enough? Take care! Such treatment is punished by God.”

Roland put his hand caressingly on her arm. “There! there! mother dear, you must not worry about it any more.”

Yet even now he attempted no word of explanation or defense. Was it that stubborn pride of his which would never reply to unjust accusations, or the guilt which had no defense to offer? The mother’s heart was tortured with this question.

“Can it be, Roland,” she asked earnestly, “that you were not free to love her when you married her?”

Roland gave a short laugh, but only shook his head.

“You may think you can laugh everything away, but I tell you, Roland, that a man must take care of what he prizes. If you did not see it, I saw that Ferdinand was very much taken with Stephana —”

“Mother!” he interrupted, with no trace of laughter left, “I can defend my wife, and I would rather that even you did not mention Ferdinand’s name in connection with hers.”

“Then see that you make her happy,” his mother retorted. “A woman happy in her husband’s

love is not in danger. It is the woman with the empty and disappointed heart who becomes food for such as Ferdinand.”

In spite of everything, the solemn midnight service, that night, had more of peacefulness about it than of sorrow. The man in whose behalf it was said had been at rest from his earthly sins for nearly a decade. The anguish he had caused his wife and children during his lifetime was dimmed by years, and by the better times that had come to them. And Roland's mother, looking at the clear-cut features of her son, and beholding the honest light of his gray eyes, found her doubts shriveling into nothing. Surely all would come out right in the end, she told herself, as she looked from him to the pale face of Stephana, which never had been more lovely than it was at this minute. On her knees the dowager forgot the dead, and prayed that the living might have the happiness it had never been her own lot to know.

CHAPTER XX

STEPHANA'S SLIPPER

“WILL you ride with me this morning?”

Roland stood before his wife in his riding-clothes. Stephana's first impulse was to refuse — not so much the invitation as the smile with which it was given. She wished to snub him, to tell him that she preferred to stay by herself, as she had done for the last two weeks ; but she repressed this inclination and gave an indifferent assent.

The bad humor of the weather had fled, and the sun shone as if it had never known what the sulks were. During the ride Roland was as blithely friendly as if there were no shadow of disagreement between them. They rode to the edge of the estate, and took luncheon at a small inn, which nearly turned itself inside out at the honor done it.

Stephana had been coolly and impersonally polite during the morning. On the ride back she found it hard to resist thawing into actual friendliness under the sunny good-humor of her husband ; but she steeled herself against him with the remembrance of the lonely days just passed. If he thought he could neglect her as much as pleased

him, and then come home to find her glad to welcome him back, he must learn that he was mistaken.

"Were you not lonesome down here in the country during the last fortnight?" he asked casually.

The apparently malicious audacity of the question took her breath away.

"Not lonesome for me," he went on cheerfully; "but the beastly weather, and the lack of company, and Solange's going away, and all that?"

"I could have screamed from lonesomeness," Stephana replied. "I used to think I wanted it in New York, but I did n't know what it was. Another month of it would make me the greatest worldling in France."

"H'm!" he stroked his chin. "I have had the house in the faubourg made ready for us. How long would it take you to pack up for Paris?"

"For Paris," Stephana repeated; "I could be ready in an hour."

Roland laughed at her vehemence. "Then we shall leave here to-morrow — since we can't all be so expeditious as you. There are several things I have to see to before going away again."

Stephana was as interested as a schoolgirl making her first venture out into the world. And so engrossed was she during the rest of the day in her own preparations, that she did not notice, until

the next morning, that she alone was to accompany her husband.

"Why, mamma, are you not coming, too?" she cried in manifest consternation.

"I will follow after a while, *mignonne*. There is much to do in the château before I can leave it."

"It is perfectly respectable — my mother's being here alone," Roland suggested, with a demure air of propriety.

Stephana said nothing further on the subject, although she felt that he had in a measure tricked her into the trip to Paris.

Of all the beauties of Paris, her backyards and courtyards are the most charmingly characteristic. Palaces, monuments, and triumphal arches require only capitalists to pay, artists to perform, and heroes to commemorate; but a city in which the backyards are so delightful and well cared for as those of Paris possesses a general love of beauty among its dwellers most remarkable to American eyes.

In the courtyard of the de Longtour hôtel, vines grew luxuriantly on the surrounding walls, while bushes around their feet tempered the architectural rigidity of the rectangle. Two big horse-chestnut trees grew and bloomed by the heavy iron gate.

"Oh! what a lovely spot!" Stephana cried, as

they drove in under the old stone arch, chipped by bullets of the Commune.

Roland's eyes rested lovingly on the house. "It does n't look as if it had recently been desecrated by the presence of a millionaire Swiss chocolate-manufacturer, does it? If he had n't found the atmosphere of the faubourg as chilly as the tops of his Alps, I am afraid I could not have persuaded him to cancel the rest of his lease."

"Well, I'm glad the faubourg was not too kind to him. And what a dear old house it is!"

Roland beamed at her enthusiasm. Nothing could have flattered him more than her appreciation of it.

"Would you like to go over the house at once — if you are not too tired?" he asked eagerly.

"Indeed I should."

Together they rambled through the stately halls and generous rooms. Of a large and sombre turn of mind must the old de Longtours have been, judging by their abode; and the new mistress of it felt very young and American as she went from room to room.

"And this suite here is yours," Roland said, throwing open a door. "I have tried to give you the conveniences you have been accustomed to."

It was a sunny suite of rooms, from which the sombre hangings and dark woodwork had been banished, while the plumber, pride of America,

had been invoked to bring the luxury of the waters almost to the bedside.

"I feel as if I had stepped from the middle ages into day after to-morrow," Stephana said, with a little laugh. She added carelessly: "Are these the rooms usually occupied by the Duchesse de Longtour?"

"No," Roland answered.

In spite of the thoughtfulness manifest in the preparations for her, a queer little pang of disappointment shot through Stephana's heart. Neither in Touraine nor here had she been given the apartment that had belonged to other duchesses. She stifled her disappointment, however, and continued her explorations. The armory interested her most. Here were the very instruments with which the de Longtours had hewn their way to distinction so long ago. To Stephana, as to most Americans, the world was a young, fresh world, and even the age-old monuments of Europe were more "quaint" than actually old; but when the ages stepped into the family like this they impressed her.

Roland took up an old sword from under a glass case.

"Here is the sword of the first of my ancestors — the first authentic one. He fought by the side of Charles Martel."

"How long ago was that?"

"About twelve hundred years."

"It makes me dizzy to think that those people really existed, outside the history books."

"They did, though, and his name was the same as mine. Roland has always been the name of the oldest son of the de Longtours. That sword over there belonged to his grandson, who was one of the captains of Foulk de Nourat."

"You are very proud to be a de Longtour, are you not?"

"Yes."

"It is only lately that I can appreciate just how you feel about it. It is really wonderful to know what your family has been for so many generations."

"It makes one feel very small to think that one cannot even keep up the name decently by one's own efforts."

It was a topic they had not touched on for a long time. Roland did not pursue it. He showed Stephana a case wherein were two swords and a battered suit of armor.

"Those were the de Longtour arms when an ancestor of mine went to the Holy Land with Saint Louis. All of these things were buried during the Revolution and thus escaped. They were even more fortunate later. My father sold them at auction, but my uncle secretly bought them in, and gave them back to me. They and the por-

traits in the dining-room would all have been in Touraine," he went on, with a laugh, "except that my Swiss tenant had a strong *penchant* for ancestors and armor. Poor chap! I wonder how I should feel to hire my ancestors."

Roland did not speak with the bitterness he would have shown a few months earlier. His attitude toward the world had changed considerably since the death of his uncle.

Dinner was announced before Stephana had half exhausted her new treasure-house. Seated in the overpoweringly big dining-room at a small table, beneath the painted eyes of his ancestors, she had an unwonted sense of intimacy with her husband. The feeling was so strong that it embarrassed her, especially when a silence fell between them. Partly to break it, she asked: —

"Is that a portrait of you?" indicating a picture at the far end of the room, which looked at her with his gray eyes.

"Perhaps, though the incarnation was four centuries ago. It is curious that my mother always maintains that I am not like the de Longtours, although I look tremendously like the old ones — that one there, for example. If you were nearer, you would see what an old painting it is. Neither my father nor his fathers for three generations have been tall as I; but the first men of my race were tall and had my coloring."

After dinner they went into the library, where a bright wood-fire was burning. Coffee and liqueurs were brought to them there, and as Roland lounged and smoked in a big armchair, while Stephana was lost in another, a sense of comradeship, of friendship grew up between them.

Stephana held out her toes to the blaze, and one of her slippers fell from her foot. Roland was on his knees in an instant to restore the fugitive to its place. He did not rise at once from his devotional position.

"What pretty feet you have, Stephana," he said.

"Have I?" She glanced down carelessly. "All American women have, have n't they?"

"Ah! but you are not American — not typically so, I mean."

"Why do you think that?"

"I don't know exactly," he answered, drawing his chair a little nearer the fire. "I think it is because you impress one as having leisure to develop a soul. Most of your countrywomen are so tremendously busy cultivating their minds, or their muscles, or their philanthropic emotions, that their souls haven't an opportunity to sprout. They are brilliant and athletic and domineeringly philanthropic, but —" He shrugged his shoulders.

"So I am not brilliant and athletic and philanthropic?"

"Not in the American fashion."

"You do not like American women?"

"Yes, I *like* them, without finding in them the charm they ought to have. They are too self-reliant. A man desires in his wife a certain dependence which will make him assume the responsibility of protecting her, and which will make him strong."

"Women ought to be weak in order that men may be strong?" she asked, shading her eyes from the fire and glancing curiously at him. The point of view was different from what she ordinarily heard.

"In a way, yes."

"Then because our women are strong, our men are weak?" There was amusement in her voice.

Roland laughed too. "It has only made the women restless in their strength. As for the men, they are the finest in the world. They are the only men who could live with the American women."

"Well, it's only fair they should have to live with them, if they have made them what they are. I suppose you consider our men rather unhappy?"

"They are philosophical. Moreover, they love work as no other race does. But it is not they who are the great losers, it is the women themselves."

For ten minutes there was silence between them, the silence that can come only with friend-

ship. Then Roland leaned forward and asked abruptly: —

“Stephana, there is one thing I cannot understand: why did you want to marry a nobleman?”

She did not answer at once. Gazing into the fire she saw herself again awaiting Roland, Duc de Longtour, in the library of the New York house; saw him come in at the door; heard his formal proposal.

“My father wanted it,” she answered at length.

“But ought you to have sacrificed yourself for his ambition?”

Stephana felt that the conversation was taking a turn that she could not endure long with equanimity.

“You see, monsieur le duc,” she said lightly, “my family only starts with my grandfather; still I feel that I owe it something, as you owe something to yours. Indeed, I’m not sure but that a young family like mine ought to be treated with greater tenderness than one that can stand on its own legs. Don’t you think so?”

Roland laughed again. Our families have been very busy in our lives thus far. Don’t you think we both owe something to ourselves — perhaps even to each other?”

Though he had spoken in her own light tone, there was a tremor of deeper feeling in his voice. Stephana’s heart beat more tumultuously: she

might have responded to it, but for certain rankling remembrances. From one of these she spoke next.

"I am glad you did not give me the regular apartment of the Duchesse de Longtour." She strove to make her voice entirely natural, but in spite of her it sounded hard. "It would have been trying for *maman* to have had to give up that to which she had been accustomed."

"That was not the reason," Roland answered slowly. "I had often heard my mother say that the duchess's apartment was filled with the sighs of the dead. I am not superstitious, but I wished you to begin your married life under happier auspices."

Stephana glanced at her husband, startled. She could not quite make him out. Several times what had seemed a slight on his part had turned out to be prompted by the greatest thoughtfulness.

She rose from her seat. "I am a little tired. I think I should like to go to bed."

Roland escorted her to the foot of the stairs. She gave him her hand, and he raised it to his lips.

"Good-night," she said.

He stood watching her mount the stairs. At the top she turned and looked down on him. For the fraction of a second she hesitated, then disappeared.

The duke stood for a minute longer, as if hoping that she would return. Then slowly he went back to the library. He closed the door, arranged the fire, and sat down in his chair. Lighting a cigar, he held it absently in his hand until it went out. The fire burned lower and lower; a log broke in two, and the pieces sought opposite corners of the hearth to smoulder into blackness. The candles, one after another, flared up, then went out. The gray dawn gradually crept in. Only then did Roland rouse himself from his meditations and seek his own room.

CHAPTER XXI

A WOMAN'S TONGUE

STEPHANA woke the next morning, happier than she had been since the first morning of her arrival in Touraine. The succession of miserable days, the best of which had held only negative happiness, through forgetfulness or apathy, was at an end. Roland had surely been her lover the night before, restrained as had been his words and actions; and the hateful question of money could no longer intrude between them.

To her, yet half asleep, Maggie brought a big box of white roses. "Them's from the dook, your Highness."

With half-whimsical stupidity, Maggie — pretending that she could not distinguish between them — would insist on applying to Stephana any title that caught her ear.

Stephana sat up in bed and buried her face in the flowers. The sharp edge of a card came into contact with her nose. She rubbed it while she read: "Not American beauties, but are n't they sweeter?"

The roses were just the touch needed to complete her happy contentment. The sunshine was

flooding her room, and she sprang into it with a zest for living that she had not felt for many a day.

It was already late, and after partaking of her chocolate and rolls, and dressing, the Comtesse de Maurierval's card was brought up to her, and blooming like a red rose, Estelle entered her boudoir.

"I just ran in for a moment to welcome you to Paris," Estelle gushed, kissing Stephana on both cheeks. "It is the first morning for weeks when I could take my walk. I believe you brought the sunshine with you — you look as if you had."

"Do I? Well, I did n't bring it from Touraine. The weather there has been simply awful ever since you went away."

"And these flowers! What admirer has already found out that you were here? Roland? That is one of the things I admire most about him. He always does know how to do the right thing with women."

The praise of her husband had an oddly chilling effect on Stephana.

Estelle rose from her seat and went to the mirror. "These new hats, they *are* a nuisance! One has to have your hair, my dear, to wear them with comfort."

Stephana tried to shake off the feeling of resentment she had toward the countess.

“But the hat could not be more becoming to any one — and I’m sure your hair is lovely,” she cried.

The Comtesse de Maurienvall made a slight grimace. “It ought to be — it cost enough. But you know what Frenchmen are : they adore beauty and we poor wives need all the aids we can get. Even as it is, my poor Pierre has the most mad infatuations. But he always returns to me swearing that none of the others can hold a candle to me.”

“You take it philosophically.”

Estelle shrugged her shoulders. “What is the use of making yourself unhappy or disagreeable about it? That’s what I told your friend, Princess Montignolli — Miss Bertha Whiting that was. ‘Console yourself,’ I said, when she was weeping wet tears on my shoulder, over the prince’s fickle disposition. And what do you suppose the minx did? Snatched my Pierre from under my very nose, and they’ve been like a pair of turtle-doves ever since. If that is n’t ingratitude, I never saw it.”

Stephana laughed. There was little tragedy in life, as Estelle viewed it.

“A woman must not show a man that she cares about his peccadillos,” the countess rattled on; “though I must admit that Montignolli fairly galloped through his honeymoon to get back to

his usual pursuits — and he has a marvelous capacity for pursuing, that prince! I sometimes think Italians are worse than the French — and you know what Frenchmen are!”

“I don’t think I should include all Frenchmen in the same category,” Stephana remarked with cool rebuke.

The countess’s face showed a well-bred endeavor to hide her amazement. “Oh! you mean Roland’s constancy,” she stammered. Then she smiled, in enlightenment. “Of course! I might have guessed that a queer fellow like Roland would have told you. I’ve often thought it would be better in our marriages if all those things were frankly understood.”

Stephana’s brain reeled. The pretty room filled with sunshine turned to a glare of hateful white, and something seemed to be strangling her. Then she struggled to imitate Estelle’s careless shrug of the shoulders, and heard herself saying: —

“Does a little frankness more or less matter in things of this kind? If one accepts the main fact, the degree does not make any especial difference.”

The countess looked at Stephana with a countenance on which admiration was plainly depicted. “It is wonderful to me how adaptable you American women are. I hear that in your own country you would not stand such a state of affairs for a minute.”

"When we marry into the aristocracy of Europe we can't expect to carry our own provincial standards with us, can we?" Stephana asked in a hard tone.

"But every one can't be so reasonable," Estelle sighed. "Even I lose patience sometimes; and usually it takes an American a year to get out of the dumps. You are cleverer than most. It does relieve one of certain responsibilities, however, to have it all perfectly understood."

"Yes, it simplifies things a good deal," came from Stephana's dry lips.

Although the countess's pretty face was bland and confidential, Stephana felt, subconsciously, that her guest would derive satisfaction from any sign of hurt she might give, and it became her supreme effort to conceal the torment she was suffering.

Estelle opened a silver cigarette-case which hung from her belt. "Have you learned this one of our vices yet?" She offered her hostess a cigarette. "This is the White Rose, my favorite brand."

Stephana had never smoked a cigarette in her life, but she accepted.

Amusement was deep hidden in Estelle's eyes, as she noted the unaccustomed way in which Stephana handled the cigarette. She herself lighted one with the grace of the expert, and blew

smoke rings into the air while covertly studying the girl who had married the man she once had loved. There was something in the pure face, in the proud carriage of the head, and in the high-bred pretense of not suffering, which irritated the Comtesse de Maurienvall. In a lesser actress than herself it might have caused asperity of manner, but not in her. That there was not sufficient sympathy between the two for them ever to be friends was patent; and when between two such women there is simulation of friendship, the ground is well prepared for hate. Estelle would have liked to see Stephana break down and cry, that she might play the part of confidant and adviser. Above all, she would like to see the flush of shame creep into those cheeks now so purely pale.

Yet when she spoke again it was only with the friendly raillery of one pretty woman to another.

"I know one man who will be the happiest in Paris to know that you are here — Ferdinand de Tournelles. Will you believe that he has been walking by here every day, in the hope that you had arrived?"

"How did *you* know that we had come?" Stephana asked.

"I met Roland, of course."

"Really? Where did you meet him?"

The countess's silvery laugh filled the room,

as she rose to her feet. "My dear, you are clever; but maybe I have already talked more than I ought. I must not make trouble. He told me, though, that you had no other engagement for to-night; so you are to come to dinner with us — quite informally — only a cousin or two to welcome you to Paris."

Of all things in the world Stephana would rather not have seen any more of Estelle on this day; but lest this should be apparent she returned her parting kiss with more than perfunctory warmth.

"We shall be charmed to come to dinner," she said.

Estelle held her off at arm's length. "My dear, you can become the Queen of Paris. The faubourg is waiting to receive the Duchesse de Longtour with open arms — but you yourself it will love as it has never loved an American."

Stephana hardly paid attention to the words that fell on her ears. She only knew that at last she was to be relieved of the almost intolerable presence of the woman who was torturing her.

Slowly she walked back to her bedroom. Again the earth had opened and swallowed up all her dreams of happiness. But as she dumbly looked upon the new wreckage of her life, it was not the Comtesse de Maurienvall's words which recurred to her: it was those of Roland's mother:—

“They are all alike, the de Longtours,” and,
“There are many ghosts — they are the souls of
the women whose hearts were trampled upon by
the Ducs de Longtour.”

CHAPTER XXII

AN ENTENTE CORDIALE

THE Comtesse de Maurienval walked out beneath the flowering horse-chestnut trees, and down the Boulevard St. Germain, with a step which she could hardly subdue to the soberness the staid faubourg demanded. On the bridge over the Seine she permitted herself a hop, like a naughty child enjoying a forbidden pleasure. The broad bright expanse of the Place de la Concorde seemed to get into her veins still more, and an unsuppressible smile overspread her dark, piquant features. Yet for all the brightness around her, and her own good looks, it was not an entirely pleasant smile. Seeing it, a man would instinctively put his hand on his pocket, if his treasure lay therein; a woman would put her hand to her hair, to see if wanton wisps were playing her false. It was a smile such as the Roman women perhaps wore when some uncommonly humorous incident happened in the Coliseum.

Turning into the Champs-Élysées she met her cousin, Ferdinand de Tournelles, beard neatly trimmed, hands tightly gloved, and clothed to perfection, in the style of the French.

"Aha! I was just thinking of you — and of the pretty wife of Roland," she exclaimed, her smile breaking into a laugh at the appositeness of the meeting.

"Thank you for thinking of me with her," he answered gayly. He had always liked the mischievous devil that inhabited the fair form of this cousin of his. She expected nothing of him that his own inclinations did not urge him to be. To her, as to him, the world was a place to amuse one's self in.

"Yes, I have just called on the young American of whom you were so much *épris* in Touraine. And I found her — how do you think? Bright as the morning — with roses from Roland! Defenses of Frenchmen on her lips — for Roland! Sunshine in her eyes — because of Roland!"

Ferdinand made a grimace. "And is that what you came so smiling to tell me? I might, if I were reminiscent —"

"Take care!" She lifted a daintily gloved forefinger in warning. "Remember, we are allies. It is my privilege sometimes to tease, while I help; but no twitting on facts by you, or the *entente cordiale* — pouf! — it will be gone. Besides which you are ungrateful. I said a pretty word or two for you, and would have said more, if it had been the psychological moment. Instead, we talked, — of what do you think?"

"I can't guess."

"Of Roland's constancy."

"Roland's constancy?" he repeated blankly.

She nodded, her eyes narrowing in her enjoyment of his dismay. "When in our discussion of Frenchmen she coolly informed me that all Frenchmen could not be credited with the same lightly amorous disposition, I exclaimed, quite innocently: 'Oh! you mean Roland's constancy!' You should have seen her getting whiter and whiter, as I prattled on. When I had finished, 'Of course in a *mariage de convenance*, like ours,' she stammered, 'it is best to have everything plainly understood,' — as if the little Puritan would ever have married her Roland with 'understandings'! She bit her lips; she put her hand to her throat, and gasped like a chicken with the pip."

"Poor little thing!" Ferdinand cried with genuine pity.

"Yes, 'poor little thing!'" Estelle mimicked, with a vicious gleam in her black eyes. "You great, generous-hearted creature! I suppose if she ever comes to your arms for consolation, you will take her by the hand and lead her back to her husband and the paths of rectitude."

Ferdinand laughed, swinging his slender cane. He did not pretend to dwell long on the heights.

"But why are you taking so much trouble in the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, just because I like you — and I hate him!" Her white teeth came together with a vicious little snap.

"Are you quite sure you don't love him instead?" Ferdinand asked, watching her with lazy amusement.

"Love him? I *hate* him! I did n't go down to Solange's wedding, and smirk and smile and kiss his stiff American wife, for nothing. A woman like me does n't forget such a slight as I received from him."

The Marquis de Tournelles looked at his cousin with admiration. "You are a good hater. But how did you have the nerve to 'prattle'? Suppose she goes to Roland?"

The Comtesse de Maurienvall shrugged her pretty shoulders. "She won't, or I don't know women. But if she does, what can happen to me? A scene with Roland — and I lose *her* valuable friendship, that is all. One does n't go to law about it, like the vulgar Americans. If it were you, now, he might run you neatly through the lungs, the *beau sabreur* that he is; but he can't fight a woman. Besides, I have infinite faith in this." Her pearly teeth opened, and her finger touched the tip of her little red tongue.

"I declare I am sorry for Stephana, though," Ferdinand mused aloud. "Think of that lovely, pure face touched with sorrow!"

"Bah! you men!" Estelle cried angrily. "I believe you are really afraid of Roland."

Ferdinand carefully lighted a cigarette. "My dear Estelle, did you ever know me to desist from laying my humble affections at the feet of a woman because of the size or ferocity of the husband in the background?" he asked with gentle reproach.

"I was unjust to you, Ferdinand. Forgive me. All the same, I advise you to make hay now — while the sun does not shine. For when it does you are likely to shrivel up and blow away in the strength of its rays. If you had gone to see her this morning, before I called, I think you would have had your trouble for your pains."

"What if I had?" Ferdinand responded lightly.

He twirled his cane, and blew a puff of smoke heavenward. Was this not a most cheerful world to live in, with the trees in new leaf, the sun neither too hot nor too cold, the gay equipages driving up and down the Champs Élysées, the automobiles darting along inside on their dark oily strips: was it not pleasant for one with looks and position and money? He felt the better side of him aroused. And he had a better side: no man so uniformly successful with women as he but must have. He even prided himself on it at times, though he did not often let it stand in the way of his pleasures.

“What if I had?” he repeated with an airy gesture of his right hand. “If she really cares for Roland —”

“One can ‘really care’ for Roland,” Estelle interrupted, sneering, “and one can really stop caring for Roland, if a better man appears. It remains for you to prove that you are the better man.”

There was provocation in the words of the Comtesse de Maurienvall, and in the taunting glance she gave him. In her there was always recognition of the pleasant existence of evil, and of the joy of evil-doing.

The sinister side awoke within Ferdinand de Tournelles. The broad avenue leading up to the Arc de Triomphe lost its innocent gayety and took on the intenser hue of desire. For him, too, there should be the delirium of triumph—of triumph in love and in hate. His face flushed, and his hands became damp. He no longer swung his slender cane casually: he held it as if it were a rapier.

“I shall call to pay my respects to the Duchesse de Longtour this afternoon—and many other afternoons,” he said.

The countess gave a little satisfied nod. “You will also come to dinner with us to-night? She will be there.”

CHAPTER XXIII

ESTELLE'S DINNER-PARTY

ROLAND came rushing in to Stephana at noon with the enthusiasm of a boy. He had thrown off a dozen years of gravity since coming to Paris.

“What do you think I have been doing this morning, while you slept?” he almost shouted. “I have been buying an automobile! And out of compliment to you I got an American machine — a new one just sent over. It is what your countrymen would call ‘a dream.’ It purrs like a cat. On what they call the high speed, it will creep along like the shadow of a cloud on a calm day, or it will tear over the country like a hurricane. I have ridden a running thoroughbred, but never has the wind whistled past my ears as it did to-day. Of course I have been in other machines, but as a guest. As the owner — as the soul and brain of the thing — it is quite different. Will you go to the Bois with me this afternoon, in our beautiful new Columbia touring car? Oh, not alone! I would not risk you with my unaided skill, though I have been practicing all the morning. You will go, will you not?” he repeated,

noticing for the first time Stephana's unresponsiveness.

"No, I shall be shopping this afternoon," she replied, manufacturing the pretext on the moment.

"Bother the shopping! You surely do not need any more clothes, after the van-load you brought from America. Or if you must shop, let us meet for tea somewhere, and ride in the Bois afterwards. Come! we may have all sorts of adventures. I may try to climb a tree, or run over a fat lady. The world is young and not to be depended on. I am leaving the Nineteenth Century of Horse and entering the Mile-a-minute Twentieth Century to-day."

Noticing at last that there was more than ordinary coolness on Stephana's part, he stopped his gay flow of talk to ask anxiously: "Is anything the matter? Don't you feel well?"

His manner exasperated Stephana. What right had he to inquire with apparent solicitude about her well-being, — as if any one else than he were responsible for all the misery that had befallen her?

"Nothing is the matter," she answered shortly; "but you will have to excuse me from coming with you this afternoon. I dare say you will have no trouble in amusing yourself without me."

The Duc de Longtour looked at his wife in



ESTELLE DE MAURIENVAL

comical amazement. Again she had executed a complete *volte face*. In ordinary matters he would not have called her capricious; but of her varying attitudes towards him he did not know what to think. The night before he had told himself that all was coming out well. Fifteen hours afterwards and he would not have known her for the same woman whose slipper he had replaced, whose hand he had kissed good-night.

His enthusiasm dashed, Roland returned to his former grave demeanor. His usual politeness remained, and the two talked during luncheon as one does before the servants.

"Estelle was here this morning," Stephana remarked once. "She told me that she had seen you —"

She broke off abruptly and looked at him, with a certain challenge.

"Yes, she asked me if we had any engagement to-night," he replied quickly — too quickly it seemed to Stephana. "I told her we had not. I thought you might like to go out after your quiet weeks in the country, although I don't care very much for the de Maurienvals and their set, even if she is my cousin."

"No, they know too much," Stephana thought, saying nothing.

"Of course, according to the strict French custom, we should keep in seclusion for a certain

length of time," he went on; "but I do not believe in the old-fashioned ostentatious mourning. It is the last thing my uncle would have wished from us."

Stephana spent the afternoon in a fever of shopping — not that she needed anything; but women often find surcease for sorrow in shopping, as men do in work or drink. She returned only in time to dress for dinner.

As they were going down to the carriage, Roland stopped her.

"Stephana, I do not understand you," he said. "What have I done to offend you since last night?"

"You!" She gave a mirthless laugh. "Why nothing, of course. Why should you think that all my moods come from you? I am interested in other persons besides you, and they affect me quite as much."

She brushed past him. Roland shook his head in a kind of pathetic despair, and followed her down to the carriage.

The dinner of the Comtesse de Maurienvall was hastily gotten up, but there was nothing slipshod about it. She had the faculty of imparting *verve* to whatever she did, and it was quite a brilliant little gathering. Ferdinand and the Princesse Montignolli were there, and they were wont to shine in any company. There was also an ar-

tist whose wall-filling allegorical picture of a pale blue and yellow Hell, with the Emperor William figuring as Satan, and a number of well-known anti-Dreyfusards as lesser devils, had caused Monsieur Frémeau himself to become something of a notable. The only other outside guest was a senator who had risen to a pinnacle of prominence by his ardent advocacy of a rigorous law to compel Frenchmen to drink their own light wines.

It was all carefully arranged. The artist and the senator might be relied on conversationally to act the part which the palms play in the conservatory. And well they played their parts. The senator was bitterly chagrined that his own face — passionate anti-Dreyfusard that he was — had not figured among the pale blue devils of M. Frémeau's picture, and this lent acerbity and vigor to their discussions. The one and then the other spouted forth his ideas on matters and things, until they locked horns on the great question of whether Wine or Art were the more important industry of France, while the bright eyes and clever, goading remarks of their hostess, stimulated them whenever there threatened a cessation of hostilities.

In their frenzy they threw out an impenetrable spray of conversation behind which Ferdinand could talk to Stephana, and Pierre de Maurien-

val to Princess Montignolli, without let or hindrance. There was, moreover, a centrepiece of flowers on the table, which tactfully kept husbands and wives out of sight of each other, while inciting artist and statesman to bark freely — as a picket-fence incites two dogs.

Ferdinand sat at Stephana's right. "I was sorry to find you out this afternoon," he said.

Again it was his manner, not the words, which seemed to mean so much. Ferdinand's eyes had long lashes, and they looked a respectful devotion which somehow soothed her wounded spirit.

"I don't suppose you quite understand what it means to me to have you here in Paris," he went on. "You probably have a great capacity for making friends. For my part I have many acquaintances; but since the first day I saw you I felt that *we* should be friends."

"Do you think any one has many?" Stephana asked. "If one were never disappointed it would be easy to go on making one friend after another. But a bitter disappointment in a person one has believed in seems to kill the capacity for friendship."

"Should it be so?" he protested. "We know that such a thing as real friendship exists. Prospectors looking for gold do not lose faith in the existence of what they are seeking."

He spoke with such sincerity that Stephana

felt solace in his words and in the friendship he offered her.

The dinner went on from course to course. The countess kept an eye on Ferdinand and saw that he was making progress. Stephana did not speak much. She was in no mood for it. He saw this and sympathetically shielded her from having to talk. Her eyes fixed on the warring speakers, she thought her own thoughts. Ever since morning she had been trying to adjust herself to the new conditions of which she had learned. There was a strain of the philosopher in her; and now her striving for a working compromise with herself and the world around her seemed to crystallize in this atmosphere which might have appeared so far removed from philosophy.

What was the use of expecting things to be different from what she found them? She was in this life, and she might as well enjoy what pleasures it offered, without eating her heart out because they were not what she would have wished them to be. She turned and gave a more attentive ear to the senator. He was an orator of some repute, and was really amusing, if one paid attention to what he said.

It was comedy — all comedy (her thoughts were wandering again). A comedy built on tragedy, which is the truly humorous kind. Well, she would cease sulking. She would not subject

Roland de Longtour — who was only like the rest of the de Longtours — to her humors and vapors any more. She would be gay and worldly with the best of them. She could hold her own among these Parisians if she chose. What, after all, was the use of dreaming of other things than Fate accorded one? And why imagine that she would be any happier in other circumstances, since she was not happy in those which the world considered the most fortunate? Her companions did not make themselves miserable by vain regrets. Here was the Princesse Montignolli, — whose marital troubles were notorious, — her head bent over her plate, saying something in an undertone to de Maurienvall; and both were flushed and interested, if not happy. Roland, on the other side of the centrepiece, might easily be bending his head towards the “one woman” of his constancy; nor did it require any stretch of the imagination to picture Estelle similarly employed. The senator and the artist, — where were their wives? She believed both of them had wives.

She turned back to Ferdinand, with a gay laugh for a clever *riposte* of the artist's at a vicious lunge of the senator's, and from then on took her part in the war of words.

Her changed mood grew upon her with the progress of the dinner. Was champagne put here to be sipped abstemiously? It was exhilarating

to feel one's sense of responsibility slipping from one. She had managed so ill when she had tried to direct her own destinies, let chance take them in hand and see if it could do any better! She was absolved from those principles which had conduced so little to her contentment.

Her eyes grew brighter and her manner took on a certain recklessness which intoxicated Ferdinand at her side far more than the wine he had drunk. Once, in leaning forward, she caught Roland's eyes, and saw in them a wonder that was almost reproof. She broke into a laugh at the sight. Let him wonder. The day was past when women stayed at home and meekly mourned, if conjugal happiness did not fall to their lot.

There was not much at her table that escaped the sparkling eyes of the Comtesse de Maurienval, and she considered her little dinner decidedly a success.

In the drawing-room she whispered to Stephana: "Do you see how magnanimous I am? I do not make the slightest fuss about having the princess here for my Pierre. They don't have to meet slyly in other places, while I try to delude myself into thinking that they do not meet. That is the modern wisdom."

To Roland it was a long evening. On the way home he gravely asked of Stephana: "Did you enjoy yourself?"

“Very much. I was especially glad to see Bertha Whiting again. We are going to spend the afternoon together to-morrow.”

“I was in hopes that you would give me to-morrow afternoon,” Roland protested gently.

“Oh *dear* no! There are far too many things to do in Paris to trot around with one's husband.”

CHAPTER XXIV

A PRINCESS, AND HER LOT

STEPHANA'S nature seemed to change from the night of the Comtesse de Maurierval's dinner. Her manner toward Roland lost its different baffling moods and became coolly friendly: she treated him as if she had become one of those *mondaines* of the smart set whose lives have little to do with those of their husbands. Throwing herself into the Paris season with abandon, she lived only for each day's distraction, although half unconsciously she was ever wondering which of all these women was the one who held her husband's love. Estelle let drop a hint here, an innuendo there, but Stephana steadily ignored them. She would discuss her husband with no one.

The season this year was madly brilliant. It was at the height of the good times, and America had poured its million millionaires abroad with teeming pockets and ambitious wives. There was a series of balloon races to make the world sit up and raise its eyes heavenward — eyes long cast downward on the earth. And, lastly, the Prince of Wales had come over to baptize the new-born

cordial relations between France and England; and the populace greeted his every appearance with complimentary cries of "Eep-eeep-uh-ray!"

Gay as was the life into which Stephana plunged, it could not satisfy her restless desire for movement. She went everywhere; for the exclusive faubourg, as well as the richer, more cosmopolitan sections of society welcomed her as heartily as Estelle had prophesied. "La Duchesse Américaine" became a personality. Stories of her beauty and charm, her dresses and extravagance, began to creep into the papers. About her, too, there hovered a halo of romance, since no matter where the Duchesse de Longtour went, nor how often, the Duc de Longtour always accompanied her. The public was quick to conclude that here at last had been a real love-match, and this conduced not a little to Stephana's popularity; for the heart of the cynical old world always warms to a love story.

Stephana saw Ferdinand in one place or another almost every day, in spite of, or it may be because of, her knowledge that Roland disapproved of him. Yet Roland made no protest at this. He only became a little graver, a little more taciturn as the days and weeks passed.

Deep in her own heart Stephana did not herself approve of seeing so much of Ferdinand as she did. She cast her doubts from her, however.

Had she not given up her old standards and ideals, and was she not henceforth to live according to this newer, laxer code of morals and manners?

Amid the incessant activity of her amusements, Stephana had the feeling that Roland was always watching over her, and it angered her that he did not trust her.

"I suppose he judges me by these women here," she reflected bitterly, "or by himself!"

It was an added incentive to her friendship for Ferdinand. As for the latter, the time for reflection with him was past: he was as genuinely in love with Stephana as it was in his self-indulgent nature to be.

There were a number of other American women in Paris, like Stephana, labeled with the titles they had bought with money sometimes honest, sometimes tainted, but no more tainted than the men whose titles it paid for. Like herself, these American women were spending their time in rushing from one gathering to another, as if the sole object of their lives was to be seen in as many different places as possible in the shortest time. Their boughten husbands only sporadically accompanied them: for the most part they were too busy gambling away the money they had sold their titles for, or squandering it on other women. In certain circles a man values a horse that is his — a wife that is another's.

And as she contemplated these other husbands, Stephana after a while began to feel grateful to the duke for his respect of appearances, and for not letting the terms on which they lived be known, even while she was irritated by his constant watchfulness. Every morning he informed himself of her plans, and every day punctiliously appeared with her in public. Yet in spite of her careless friendliness of manner and his unwavering politeness, the air became electrical. Both of them had grown thin and nervous, and there was the tension between them that exists in the quiet before the storm. In not the slightest respect did Roland try to prevent her following her own whims and fancies, yet there occasionally crossed his face a look as if he were nearing the end of his forbearance; and once or twice Stephana noticed his jaw set in a way that caused her to wonder.

Of all her companions Stephana liked Bertha, Princesse Montignolli, the best. There was honesty under her dashing manner. Her very flirtations were carried on in such a spirit of bravado that they became little more than play-acting.

Bertha never said a word to Stephana about her own husband, although his infidelities were notorious. But one afternoon as they were driving together in the Bois, they met the prince with his latest purchase. Bertha did not even glance

in the direction of the coming carriage, but her hand caught Stephana's in a convulsive clasp. Beyond this she made no sign, and in an instant her usual rattle of gay badinage continued, as if she were the last person in need of sympathy. Yet this one hand-clasp put a new face on the whole situation for Stephana. Was Bertha as unhappy as she was herself? and were her reckless flirtations only desperate attempts to "save her face"? Even if she were not deeply in love with her husband, what must she not suffer by being flouted as she was? And how gayly she bore herself! since this is the present-day fashion on this hypocritical old earth, which has always demanded that one should be becomingly sad, or piously resigned, or cheerfully frivolous, as the mode of the age might be. Though surely the humorous is the fitting view to take of such a ridiculous old planet as this we live on.

Late that night on their return from the theatre, Stephana was sitting in her boudoir, before a glimmering fire, to dispel the touch of cool in the May evening. She was in her dressing-gown, with her hair down her back, having sent Maggie off to bed. She was thinking of Bertha and the incident of the afternoon, when a message came from Roland to find out if she were still up and could see him.

A minute later he entered the room. "I have

come to you on a matter which, strictly speaking, is none of my business," he began.

"It must be very important, since it requires a midnight visit," she observed.

"It seems to be the only time that you are not occupied, and it *is* important — if the Princesse Montignolli is as great a friend of yours as she seems to be," he answered.

"Has the prince run away with a new chorus girl?" she inquired flippantly.

The duke bit his lip and half turned away. Then he faced his wife with a spark of anger burning deep in his eyes.

"You speak of such things in a tone that is hardly becoming."

Stephana shrugged her shoulders, as if the subject were not worth discussing.

"What I have come about to-night," the duke continued presently, repressing his momentary anger, "is this: the Princesse Montignolli is indiscreet. She —"

"Indiscreet!" Stephana interrupted; "I don't wonder that you come to me about it. Discretion! That is the cardinal virtue. If one be only *discreet*, then nothing else one does matters."

The Duc de Longtour was amazed at the bitterly sarcastic tone in which she spoke.

"But certainly if one is innocent, — as I believe your friend to be, — one owes it to one's self

to be also discreet. They are beginning to talk about her in the clubs, and a woman's reputation is too fragile a thing to be bandied about."

Stephana raised her eyebrows. "What would you have me do?"

"You might hint to her that it would be best to avoid being seen so much with de Maurierval."

"The prince cares little enough with whom she goes."

"The more reason for her to look out for herself."

He hesitated an instant. "There are men whom nothing interests except the pursuit of women. They have not even love for their victims — nothing except the excitement of a new conquest. No true friend of a woman would see her going with a man like this without trying to save her. Such a man is Pierre de Maurierval, — and such also is Ferdinand de Tournelles."

"Are you warning *me* now?" Stephana asked.

"I am not warning you, for I think I am able to protect you. The princess has no one to protect her: that is why her friends ought to do what they can."

"You think Ferdinand is making love to me?" Stephana harked back.

"Very gradually. He is studying you as yet."

"Perhaps that is why you give me so much of

your society abroad?" she suggested, with a touch of scorn.

"Perhaps; and perhaps I have a few old-fashioned ideas about marriage. But may I ask you—since you have made the conversation personal—how long you are going to keep up your present mode of living? You are going it harder than any other woman in Paris. I have been hoping that your good sense would call a halt. What are you going to do to-morrow?" he broke off abruptly.

"I don't know," she answered sullenly.

"Stay at home, and send for the princess to come here. Keep her to luncheon, and we will go for a drive in the afternoon. You both need a quiet day. If you will write her a note now, I will see that it is sent the first thing in the morning."

Stephana wrote the note and gave it to him; and only after he had gone did she demand of herself passionately why she had yielded to him so tamely. The power he still had over her enraged her. She burned with shame at the thought that, in spite of his irreproachable conduct in public, there were probably many others besides the Comtesse de Maurienvall who knew that another woman than his wife possessed the heart of the Duc de Longtour. And these people considered her lucky to have so "discreet" a husband!

CHAPTER XXV

BERTHA, THE WOMAN

THE Princesse Montignolli was a tall, handsome young woman of the self-reliant American type which appears even more self-sufficient than it is. In answer to Stephana's note she came to the hôtel de Longtour, her breezy, swaggering manner inviting no confidential talk, no intimate rebuke. Stephana had not appreciated how hard it would be to speak to her about her conduct with de Maurienva. With a Frenchwoman she might have reached her subject by devious approaches. With Bertha this was no more possible than to stalk a pyramid in an open desert. Thus at last Stephana blurted out: —

"Do you like de Maurienva very much?"

A curious light came into Bertha's eyes, and she did not answer at once.

"He *was* amusing," she replied finally, with the slightest emphasis on the verb. Then bluntly, "Why do you ask me this question?"

As bluntly Stephana replied, "I am afraid people are talking about you and him."

"Well, why should I care?" Bertha returned defiantly. "They talk about pretty nearly every

one, don't they? Who spoke to you about it?"

Stephana told of her conversation with Roland the night before.

Bertha walked to the window, and stood looking down into the pretty courtyard for a full minute. When she turned there were tears in her eyes, and she exclaimed passionately: —

"You are married to a decent man, and will never know the degrading things some of us come to know. To the Frenchwomen they don't seem to matter, because they expect them. After a while they either bury themselves in their homes or follow their husbands' footsteps. But to us American girls, accustomed to our men, it is awful."

"I don't know that the men in our set in America are much better," Stephana answered lamely.

"Perhaps not; but the American atmosphere at least is clean. You have the public with you. Here, if a man is unfaithful to his wife, people think it only natural." Bertha covered her face with her hands for an instant, as if to shut out all that she had been through. "When we marry noblemen, the idea is that we marry them for their titles alone. But, my dear, why can't people realize that foreign men have an art of captivating women which our own men, with their

matter-of-fact ways, have not. We women — the most modern of us — are a little romantic. We are carried away by the romance of the man of title, by his social prestige, and by the associations connected with his name. But we love the man, too. At least, I did, — I do now!”

Again she stared out of the window, while Stephana found no word to say that would help her.

“Yes, I care for him now, ridiculous as it may sound, after the indignities I have suffered at his hands. A month ago —” There was a break in her voice, but she regained her composure. “A month ago I might have done anything, I was so desperate and miserable. I might have run away with Pierre. I *did* make up my mind definitely, once, to leave Giacomo. But then — I — I found a baby was coming, and that seemed to change everything again. Life is so complicated.”

Stephana felt an unwonted sense of awe before Bertha. “Does he know?” she whispered.

“No.”

She sat down on a stool and put her elbow on Stephana’s lap, supporting her chin on her palm. Stephana caressed her hair, and bent and kissed her, though her heart was hardly less sore than her friend’s. Roland was the man whom other American wives of noblemen envied her. Stephana closed her eyes and saw again the old Mar-

quis de Chavonnay, and remembered his dying message, that her sons should be brought up to be worthy of what his own son had not been. The maternal spirit reawakened in her, as it had on the night when the dowager brought her the old marquis's message. But she had not even this to console her for that love her husband could not give her. Soon Bertha would be richer than she.

Her bitter reverie was broken in upon by her guest.

“When you asked me just now if I liked de Maurierval, I was not quite honest with you. I *did* like him quite well. I was playing with fire, and I am not sure whether I shall not yet suffer for it. Giacomo once told me that when Pierre de Maurierval paid attention to a woman, he paid a compliment to her husband. I was foolish enough to believe that if I made him jealous — if he saw that Pierre found me attractive — he would come back to me. That was how it began. But I don't believe that Giacomo ever cared for me at all; and then, somehow, I went farther than I meant to; and once when I was very miserable I answered a letter of his —”

“Oh!” cried Stephana.

“My dear child, when a woman lives in the Parisian smart set, and her heart aches over an unfaithful husband, she is likely to do things to

make you cry, 'Oh!' I came pretty near doing worse than that. Don't shudder, dear. The paroxysm is past. And do you know who saved me? It was you! The night I saw you at the de Maurienvals' dinner you were so lovely to me that I became less lonesome and desperate. Then I learned about the baby, — and when I think what I might have done! Before that I did not care what happened; but for its sake I must get hold of that letter."

"Won't de Maurienval give it back?"

"He promised to several times, but kept putting it off. Then we had a terrible quarrel, and he practically threatened me with it. I don't know how he may use it now. He — well, perhaps he is n't so very much to be blamed, considering." Bertha possessed an impersonal sense of justice rare among men, rarer still among women. "I suppose he had a certain right to think that since I had gone so far, I would go a good deal farther. Oh! I *hate* Paris!" She threw out her arms in a passionate gesture. "I hate it as I used to love it. The point of view is *awful*. Estelle says that what a woman really has to remember when she grows old is how much she has been loved by men."

"But what shall you do about the motor-trip we have all been planning to take to Biarritz next week?"

“Yes, I know. One can always be ill, though — and I don’t suppose Giacomo would miss me.”

Luncheon-time came while they were still talking, and with it Roland, grave yet cheerful. Stephana did not know whether more to admire the serene countenance he always showed to outsiders, no matter what their own differences might be, or to resent his assumption of a manner which falsely led every one to believe their relations more harmonious than they really were.

With his appearance the tension of the morning lessened, and the *déjeuner à la fourchette* was quite a gay little meal. In the afternoon the three of them took a long, leisurely motor-ride into the country, with supper in a quaint little inn beyond Versailles which was not yet spoiled by the far-reaching arm of the automobilist, with his liberal hand. It was nearly ten o’clock when they dropped Bertha at her home.

CHAPTER XXVI

A WATTEAU PANEL

IN her talk with Bertha, Stephana seemed to touch a tender reality again, amid the glittering hollowness and falsity of the life about her. The next morning she spent several hours in the shops where baby-clothes were sold, choosing the daintiest of them to give to Bertha. She found a wonderful pleasure in handling the tiny bits of lace and linen which make such appeal to the womanly imagination.

The morning was an idyllic eddy in the furious social current in which she had been whirling of late. If only she were doing this for herself! If she had to give thought to the dangers and responsibilities which went with the preparing of these little garments, how happily she would give up the present life she was leading.

The duke had asked her how long she was going to continue this life. She wondered, herself. In spite of the desperate way she had thrown herself into it, she never for a moment considered it a permanent occupation, as many women did—as her stepmother did. With them it was so serious an occupation as to acquire the dignity

of a calling. It had its own magazines, like any other profession, and received its due columns in the newspapers. But Roland was right in supposing that it had never appealed to his wife in this light. And yet she could not go back to Touraine with him now, could find no interest in the placid pursuits there, knowing that, every few weeks, "business" would call him away to the other woman, whom he loved in his discreet yet constant fashion.

Thus she mused that night, when, just before going to bed, she almost guiltily opened the box of baby things and began to play with them. With a soft light in her eyes, she twined the empty little sleeves around her neck. She closed her eyes and nestled her head against the filmy clothing, and felt the empty garments fill with pink and white baby-flesh. Her lips trembled as they sought those of the imaginary child. But these little clothes were not for a miniature Roland; they were for a future Prince Montignolli, or Donna Bertha, poor little morsel, born into the purple to have its heart broken in due course, or to break the hearts of others not yet dreamed of.

The meditations of the melancholy young woman were disturbed by the sound of wheels in the courtyard beneath her window. As she wondered what it could be, there came the muffled jar of the closing of the heavy front door. Steph-

ana started up, clasping the little bodice to her bosom; her nerves were not what they had been in the country.

Who could it be at this late hour? She remembered the night a rider had brought the news of de Brissac's death to the château in Touraine. Could anything have happened to the dowager?

She ran from her room, and in the hall met the duke, fully dressed.

"Is it bad news from mamma?" she cried, her eyes wide with fear. "We ought never to have left her alone."

"No, I do not believe it is that," he answered, reassuring her, although himself alarmed.

They heard the sound of a woman's voice in the hall below.

"A woman!" Stephana exclaimed, glancing at her husband with quick suspicion, and letting the baby's bodice slip from her fingers.

Mechanically the duke picked it up, but did not restore it to her, as a footman ran up the stairs with unusual haste to say that the Princesse Montignolli wished to see madame la duchesse.

The princess herself, ghastly pale, followed hard on the lackey, and Roland, after a glance at her, said to his wife, "I shall be in my rooms if you need me," and left them.

By the expression of Bertha's face Stephana knew that something serious had happened. Si-

lently she took her arm and led her into her own room.

Bertha threw her long cloak from her shoulders, and sank into a chair. Like Stephana, she was in her night-clothes.

"I have left him," she said. A shiver passed over her, in the warm room.

Stephana touched her hand. It was icy cold. She poured her out a glass of cordial, which Bertha drank eagerly.

"Give me some more!" she said.

Shuddering from the strength of the liquor, she drained the glass a second time, and held it out again.

"More!" she demanded.

Stephana set down the glass and came to her.

"Bertha, dear!" she cried, taking her head in her arms.

The unhappy woman pushed her away. "Give me some more of that thing!"

Stephana tried to calm her growing excitement, but Bertha was rapidly losing all control of herself.

"Give me some more of that!" she kept repeating. "Give me something to make me forget."

At her wit's end what to do, Stephana's glance fell upon the baby-clothes she had been playing with. She snatched a little garment from the box and held it up.

“Look!”

Bertha stared at it uncomprehending. “What is it?” she asked dully.

“For your baby, dear.”

For a moment longer Bertha mechanically regarded it, then broke into tears. She cried for a long time, but grew more rational amid her sobs. At last she dried her eyes and turned her swollen face to Stephana.

“He struck me!”

Stephana took Bertha’s head on her shoulder, and kissed and petted her; and at the unquestioning sympathy the latter’s tears flowed afresh. When she had regained control of herself, she continued: —

“They were playing cards at the club to-night — Giacomo and Pierre — and Giacomo won a great deal of money. At last, I don’t know how, Pierre wagered my letter —”

“The unutterable cad!” Stephana cried.

“Giacomo won again. He came home and showed it to me, and then I think I went out of my mind at the things he accused me of. I told him if he could buy mistresses with my money, I could have a lover if I wanted to. Then he struck me — he says he will kill me. What am I to do?” she wailed, no more the self-reliant girl of old, — now only the unhappy wife, unprotected and unstrung.

For a little time Stephana did not try to do more than give her the physical petting and soothing, which is of avail when all else fails. Presently she said, with a last encouraging pat:

“Wait a minute while I go and consult Roland.”

What a comfort it was to have Roland to consult! She found herself relying on him in an emergency as implicitly as Valentine herself. Noiselessly she passed into his suite. It was the first time she had been in it since the day he had shown her over the house. These were the rooms he lived in! She lingered in the first, and then passed into his bedroom. On the table by the bed stood a silver frame with the picture of a woman in it. By the dim light she could not distinguish the face. She threw back her head proudly and marched past it. Then she turned, a fierce pang of jealousy in her heart, and snatched up the frame.

It contained the photograph of herself which she had given to him when they were engaged. The sight of her own features did not pacify her. “I might have known that he would not do anything that was not correct,” she thought, a scornful smile curling her lips.

On the threshold of the next room, his sitting-room, she stopped. He was in a chair, beneath the lamp, so occupied examining the little bodice

he had picked up that he did not hear her approach.

He sprang to his feet when aware that she was looking at him. Seeing her eyes on the garment in his hand, he said: —

“You dropped it when the princess came.”

Stephana was acutely aware of the puzzled note in his voice, and explained: “It is for her — for Bertha’s baby.”

“But were you not in bed when she came?”

“No,” she answered. She was reluctant to acknowledge what she had been doing. It seemed to share her inmost thoughts too much with him. Then in an unaccountable change of mood she added defiantly: “I was playing with it. But I have come to tell you about the trouble she is in.”

When he had heard her story, his lips closed tightly, and his forehead wrinkled in thought. At length he looked up at his wife.

“She must not stay out of her house to-night, whatever happens.”

“But he struck her and threatens to kill her. How can she go home?”

He did not seem to hear her. “I must see him,” he murmured, and went to the telephone.

He rang up the prince’s residence. A servant answered that his master was not at home. Roland called up in turn half a dozen clubs, and

when he found the prince at none of them, he again called up his house.

"Tell your master," he said to the servant, "that it is of the utmost importance to him that he should speak to the Duc de Longtour at once."

A minute later the prince himself answered, his voice still hoarse with anger. "What is it?" he demanded.

"I want to see you immediately at my house, on a matter that concerns you very closely," Roland said.

There was a pause before the prince made up his mind that he would come.

Roland hung up his receiver. "I will see what I can do to mend matters when he arrives here."

"And now I will return to her," Stephana said, confident that Roland would manage it somehow.

"You need not go all the way around." He put his hand on the edge of a panel in the wall which held a painting by Watteau, and it slid back, leaving a narrow opening. Bewildered, Stephana stepped through the aperture and found herself in her own bedroom.

"Good-by!" Roland said, with a faint smile.

The panel slid back into place, and Stephana was staring at the simpering face of a companion Watteau, whom she had never suspected of being capable of concealing anything.

CHAPTER XXVII

ROLAND THINKS ALOUD

PRINCE MONTIGNOLLI had indulged his whims, small or great, all his life, until he had come to believe that the world was treating him very unkindly if it crossed him in anything. In spite of his years he was little more than a spoiled child, weak as are those who always indulge themselves, but as capable of generous impulses as of quick furies. He was of medium height, dark and handsome, of the Latin type, which the Anglo-Saxon always regards suspiciously, with a vivacious disposition, and endowed with the doubtful blessing of "temperament."

Of all the heiresses he had met in America, Stephana had been the one he would have preferred to make his wife. Indeed, he was quite desperate about her for a time; although the volatility which frequently accompanies "temperament" enabled him to console himself in what, to some less ardent natures, would have seemed a remarkably short space of time.

For Bertha he had had a brief passion, and for her positive, self-assertive nature a tremendous admiration. Her showy characteristics and sport-

ing tastes appealed to the love for "le sport" which is just awakening in the Latin races. Her very difference from his own countrywomen was at first a charm. Like many other men he gave no thought to the fact that her willfulness would inevitably clash with his when the idealities of courtship were transmuted to the realities of marriage. When in due course the collision of wills occurred, he was like a colt with its first taste of the halter; and, unfortunately, the hand which held the halter was not judicious enough to take into consideration the freedom the colt had hitherto enjoyed. A woman with more judgment, a woman herself more pliant, a woman of his own race, might have made of Prince Montignolli a pretty good husband. Although he had passed through the thirty-five years of his life at a pace in excess of that enjoined by the speed regulations of the wise, he was not at heart either so unscrupulous or so corrupt as de Tournelles and de Maurierval.

When de Maurierval, balked in his pursuit of the wife, and enraged by losing fifteen thousand francs to the husband, had staked the princess's letter against the prince's winnings, and lost, Montignolli had sprung to his feet and slapped the other's face. Yet both then, and during the subsequent arrangements for the duel, his anger was primarily directed against his wife. That his

princess should dare dishonor his name! — ah! He himself might compromise this same name with a score of women: that was only the natural wear and tear of a noble name. But for his wife to drag it into the mud by behaving with another man as other men's wives were behaving with him — that was another matter.

In the code of his set there was implicit belief in the divine right of man to amuse himself as he wished. A woman, if discovered, paid the price of her indiscretion. In this was only carried to its logical conclusion the code of the greater world outside — of nature herself.

“Well, what is it so important that I have to see you at this time of night?” the prince blustered, when Roland came down into the library to meet him. He was laboring under an excitement that hardly left him conscious of his manner.

“Sit down, Montignolli, and have a cigar,” the duke said, indicating the box on the table.

The prince glared at his host and spurned the box with a gesture of loathing; but since Roland was following his own advice, and fully occupied in cutting off the end of his cigar, both the glare and the gesture were wasted on him. For a moment the Italian stood irresolute, then automatically followed Roland's example.

They sat down.

"Now what is it you want to see me about?" the prince repeated sharply.

"The Princesse Montignolli is upstairs with my wife."

The prince sprang to his feet and threw his cigar violently away. "*Corpo di Christo!*" he shouted.

The duke would let nothing interfere with his enjoyment of his cigar. He puffed at it with the attention its excellence merited.

"You know she is an intimate friend of the Duchesse de Longtour's," he observed presently. "When a woman is in trouble, what is more natural than that she should go to her friend?"

The tone of his voice was questioning, as if he were interested in the prince's views on the subject.

"I shall kill her!" the latter cried. "For this, and for other things. Bah! These American women have no sense of dignity."

"They have a great deal more than we have," the duke observed. "What are the other things you would kill her for, Montignolli?"

"De Longtour! You forget yourself."

"My dear fellow, there is no use becoming theatrical. Let us face the situation with our reason, not with our passions. You have driven Madame Montignolli out of your house at midnight. She takes refuge here. Now what do you

propose to do? You can't kill her here, very well — and you must admit that it would be unreasonable to ask her to return with you in order that you might kill her at home." He looked up at the ceiling, and blew a mouthful of smoke toward it. "To-morrow she will engage passage on the first steamer for America, and go back to her own people, a broken woman who has bought her experience of life pretty dearly."

The prince's rage flared higher. "If *you* mention money to me —" he threatened. "I hear enough of that from her."

"I'm only trying to present the case rationally to you."

"And by what right do you present the case to me at all?" he demanded furiously.

"By the right of a friend."

"Since when are you so intimate a friend of mine?"

"Since the Princesse Montignolli deigned to accept my hospitality. Come now, Montignolli, let us be a little dispassionate."

The prince walked up and down the floor in great agitation. "Dispassionate!" he muttered, "be dispassionate when a man puts up my wife's letter as a stake!" He tramped the length of the room twice in silence. Suddenly he turned to the duke: "In my place, what would you do, monsieur?"

"If we lived in a different world, I should say, 'Take the cur and wipe up the gutters of the city with him'; but in our civilization we must protect our women more delicately. You brought it on yourself, my friend, when all is said and done. You left the princess too much alone, and Paris is no place for women with empty hearts. The atmosphere is dangerous. I admit that she has been indiscreet, but I tell you, and Madame de Longtour will tell you, that that is all."

"But the letter in de Maurienval's possession —"

"The best proof that she has not wronged you," Roland interrupted. "You would never have seen it had she been willing to buy it back with what many a woman in her position would not have considered an extravagant price. Had you been nearer her, I believe she would have gone to you with her troubles. As it was, she told Madame de Longtour. I believe her word; I do not believe de Maurienval's. The fact that he wagered the letter shows what a cad he is, and also that he has found it useless. If the princess were a weak woman, she would have been dragged down by fear. That she made the letter useless to de Maurienval shows her strength. Moreover, my dear Montignolli, your wife may still care for you. Women are unaccountable creatures," he ended, with a glimmer of humor, wholly lost on the prince.

“She never cared for me. It was my title she married. She told me so herself.”

“When she was angry with you? — perhaps when she discovered some amourette of yours?” Roland threw in.

“Y-e-s,” the prince admitted, shamefaced for the first time.

“Philip drunk and Philip sober are not so different as a woman angry and a woman loving.”

“And her money! Every time there is a difference between us she throws that at me. It is, ‘My money! my money!’ until I can stand it no longer.”

“It hurts, I admit; but is n’t it the truth?”

“It is also true that we make them noble — that we raise them from nobodies to somebodies. Do we tell them that every moment?”

“There you are making a mistake, Montignolli. They are not nobodies when we marry them. Without us they can rule the world: and without them we cannot even clothe ourselves decently, unless our tailors give us credit — which they would not do if it were not for these same American girls.”

The prince stared at the duke as if the latter had gone mad.

“We are pathetic figures, my dear fellow, we the nobles and the descendants of great names. Incapable of supporting ourselves, when we have

nothing else to sell, we sell our names, and consider that we lift up these beautiful young women who buy them." He laughed. "Lift them! we who are down and out — we who are the remnants of a worn-out aristocracy sprung from the whims of kings — and courtesans. Some of our forefathers did great deeds, but what have we ourselves done, in an age when what one *is* counts for more than what one *was*? We have no intrinsic worth at all. Our titles have only what the economists call a 'scarcity value.' On the other hand, consider what these women who marry us are. They are the buds of a new aristocracy, an aristocracy of wealth made by strength and will-power." The duke threw his head back again and laughed bitterly. "No, no, Montignolli, we do not lift them, for they are up: they lift us, for we are down."

"I thought you were proud of your name," the prince said, wondering.

"So I am — sentimentally, and because of the great deeds that have been accomplished by that name. But I am not proud of myself, the last of the name."

"De Longtour!" exclaimed the prince, "are you mad, or have you become a socialist? It is indecent, the way you talk. You are putting these half-civilized American shop-keepers and mine-diggers above us."

“Our children will be the grandchildren of these shop-keepers and mine-diggers, and it is due to the latter that we give them the advantages our birth demands.”

“A man has always been able to mate with whom he chose. Our blood washes out the sweat of the common people,” the prince sneered.

“The sweat of these common people, on the contrary, wipes out our debts, and gives us a new start in life.” The duke rose as he spoke and faced his guest. “We are both right: we make them noble; but they despise us because we were for sale and they bought us. Can our blood wipe out this last?” After a silence he continued: “We demand from women a greater purity than we give: we should not also demand greater magnanimity. Perhaps if we made them happier, they would not throw their money into our faces so much. And we must remember that they are of a different race from us. What would render a European woman contented does not suffice for them. On the whole, they put up with more from us than we do from them.”

During his talk with the duke, Montignolli had grown calmer. Now he faced his host, and drawing a letter from his pocket, waved it in the air, and demanded: —

“What would you do to your wife, if you had come into possession of such a letter, in such a manner as I did?”

"To my wife?" Roland mused. "I think I should present her the letter and ask her to be more careful in the future. I should also tell her the manner in which it had come into my possession. She would never forget either. I believe, Montignolli, that you could make the princess forget her money and your title, and like you for yourself. You are worth more than de Maurienval — and you are her husband."

Montignolli stood brooding over Roland's advice, which was so foreign to all his own impulses and ideas. The duke came up to him and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"On which side of the Atlantic would you wish your son to be born?" he asked.

"My son!" the prince exclaimed, starting.

"You did not know? I found my wife playing with this to-night." He drew from his pocket the baby garment. "She told me she had bought it for the princess. That is the only way I happen to know."

Montignolli stared at the bit of linen and lace, fascinated. Like many Italians, the thought of having children was very dear to him.

"I — I — should like to see my wife," he stammered. "Will you ask her if I may?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

HIS APPEAL

DEAREST STEPHANA: — We are going to Italy as soon as Giacomo is able to. Am I happy? I do not know, dear. But I have a hope for the future, and I had not that before. Whatever I have I owe to you, and I pray that you may never know sorrow.

BERTHA.

Stephana sat in her room, holding the letter in her hand. She re-read the last line and laughed aloud. “May I never know sorrow!” she repeated; “that is almost humorous.”

It was two days since Bertha had come to her at midnight, distracted. Now she was nursing her husband, who had been wounded in the duel with de Maurierval.

The motor-trip to Biarritz was to come off the next day. The Comtesse de Maurierval was to be one of the party. Give it up just because Pierre and Giacomo had had a little quarrel, — oh, dear, no! She found great amusement in the suggestion when one of her friends asked her. Pierre had gone to Norway, — he had always desired to

see its famous fiords, — but there were plenty of others to take his place, and Estelle saw no reason why she should make a tragedy out of a silly quarrel about some little indiscretion of the princess's.

Just why Stephana herself was going she could not have told. It was not for love of the company in general; certainly not for love of Estelle. But she had reached that stage of nervous tension when she felt that she must be going somewhere, doing something, every minute. The knowledge that Roland wished her not to go may have been a stimulus. She had become very perverse of late.

What an odd jumble it all was, she ruminated, with the letter in her hand. The decorous duel — and the auto-trip! One man's honor assuaged because an offending man further wounded him. The first man's wife reconciled to him; and the second man's wife going gayly off to Biarritz as if nothing had happened.

A momentary disgust with her whole environment seized Stephana, a desire to flee from it all. She shook off the feeling. Whither could she flee? Surely not to America, where the refulgence of her brilliant match still lingered. Not to Touraine! There was no place on this broad earth where she could turn for contentment and rest. And Roland would never find himself in a duel — she laughed at the bare thought. He had the Eng-

lish idea of the ridiculousness of dueling. Besides, whom could he fight? She went over the half-dozen men who were to be of the party to-morrow. When she came to de Tournelles the color rose faintly into her wan cheeks. Yes, perhaps Roland might fight him. Ferdinand was certainly in love with her, although she had never taken his love-making seriously. He was too expert at the game. Since coming to Paris she had appreciated this better than she had in Touraine. He was in love with her to-day, and would be with another to-morrow, — a veritable butterfly of passion. She could not imagine him the centre of a real tragedy.

Stephana saw Roland for the first time that day at dinner. He gave an involuntary exclamation of admiration when his eyes rested on her. She was dressed in a frock designed for her by the celebrated Almy, the artist who will undertake to produce garments only for such women as inspire him — a sufficiently large number, however, to bring him a princely income. (The occasional vulgar millionairess for whom he refuses to create is his best advertisement.) Stephana's beauty, he vowed, inspired him to such a degree that he could hardly descend to earthly materials: the fleecy cloud that scudded across the face of the moon was the only suitable material to adorn her, with trimmings of the iridescence

from a soap-bubble. But lacking these, he had made shift very passably, in the present case, with a liberty satin of rich yellow, made in one line from the bare shoulders to the ground. Two long bias-pieces, draped from beneath the arms, came to within ten inches of the hem. A short belt line was formed by two pieces of silver leaf, and two bands of the same over her shoulders supported the gown. Other than this, her arms and shoulders were bare, and she wore no jewelry.

When Roland and Stephana were drinking their coffee in the library after dinner, she asked casually: "Are you coming with me to the Comtesse de la Motte's to-night?"

Roland glanced at her in irritated dismay. "Do you mean to tell me that you propose going out to-night, when you have to make an early start to-morrow for Biarritz?"

"I promised Madame de la Motte to come to hear Armand Capot read his last poem."

"And do you care very much for Monsieur Capot's poem?"

"Not in the least."

"Then why not write a little note explaining why you cannot come?"

"But I am all dressed," she objected.

"If you really want to show your pretty gown, let us drive over there for a minute and explain in person the reason for your not staying."

"You are rather insulting," Stephana said coldly.

"I did not mean to be insulting — your gown is quite sufficient excuse for wishing to go out."

"Thank you. I intend to go for the evening, however."

"You are not going out to-night," he said quietly.

"Indeed! Perhaps you will use force to prevent me?" she said, raising her eyebrows.

"Possibly — if it is necessary."

Stephana rose to her feet. "I am curious to learn in what manner you will do it."

He rose, too. "What need is there of discussing what will not arise? Your good taste will save us from this unpleasantness."

She looked him straight in the eyes. "I am going out to-night," she repeated.

For a second they faced each other, he standing between her and the door. Then he stepped aside.

"I beg your pardon. I ought not to have used the word 'force.' But will you not do this for me?" He laid his hand on her arm and drew her gently to the mirror. "Look! You are worn out. I can't stand aside and see you kill yourself. You are in positive need of a good night's rest before the long day to-morrow. Now let me ring and send word that you will not want the carriage.

You do not care for these people; why should you put yourself out for them?"

"How do you know whom I care for?" she asked petulantly.

Roland leaned a little toward her. "A woman who plays with baby-clothes at midnight is not one to care for the set Estelle goes with."

Stephana turned brusquely away. She could not look into his eyes, when he spoke to her thus, without breaking down.

The duke stepped to the wall and pressed an electric button. A footman answered the summons.

"Monsieur rang?"

"Yes. Madame la duchesse wishes you to take a note to Madame la Comtesse de la Motte."

Stephana sat down at the desk, wrote her note, and gave it to the man.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am," Roland said when they were again alone. He came nearer his wife. "I have another favor to ask of you. There is no need of staying at Biarritz the fortnight the others are going to. After a day or two, will you go with me to the de Chavonnay château in Brittany? There you can rest, and perhaps we can come to know each other better."

Stephana stood irresolute, her eyes turned away. The old power of Roland's which she could not

resist surged over her at his appeal and his physical nearness.

“Surely by this time you are tired of this way of living, and of these people,” he continued. “You were not made for them any more than I am. At best a man feels that he accomplishes little enough in his life, but he *can* have what satisfaction there is in striving. In the mere seeking for amusement, however, there is nothing. My work lies on the estates in Touraine and in Brittany. The peasants on them are largely dependent on me for their degree of enlightenment and happiness. You have the ability to help me — as you showed in Touraine. Will you not — after two days in Biarritz — go with me to Brittany, and see if — alone together amid the quiet there — we cannot come to some understanding? Why should we live like enemies, when we might be friends?”

He held out his hand to her in his pleading; but his last words tormented the wound ever aching in her heart, as his first words had almost won her over.

“Friends!” she repeated under her breath. She did not want his friendship; and his love he could not give her.

Her head was carried high, and she started to speak. Roland knew by her expression that there was battle in the air. He knew also that his wife

was very tired and nervous. It was not in such a mood that he could hope to come to any rational understanding with her. He stopped the words on her lips.

"Please do not let us explain to-night. Only tell me that after a short stay in Biarritz you will go with me to Brittany."

Stephana was loath not to free her mind now and at once of all the pain and humiliation it harbored.

"Very well," she said at length, "I will go to Brittany when you wish. As for the understanding — " She shrugged her shoulders and turned towards the door. "Good-night."

Roland looked after her, his head bent forward, and his under-lip held between thumb and forefinger, as was his habit when puzzled.

CHAPTER XXIX

FROM A ROSE TRELLIS

OF the same mind as the Comtesse de Maurienal was Nature, the next morning, to thrust all unpleasantness into the background for the trip to Biarritz. The blue in the sky was vivid enough to drive out any antithetical blues from mortal mind; a kindly shower had perfectly laid the dust; while overhead floated a big pearl-colored balloon, iridescent, almost translucent, in the brilliant sunshine. It kept pace with the four flying cars beneath it for more than an hour, and added just the touch of ideality to make the scene perfect.

Not an untoward incident marred the whole journey. Owing to the usual defection of some at the last moment, there was plenty of room in the four cars, and considerable visiting about among them. In Estelle's car were Ferdinand and a very deaf aunt of hers whom she had invited on a sudden whim of generosity — "because she was deaf," surmised the Marchesa Bignatelli to the Russian Prince Dionosoff, who provided a devoted ear for all her remarks. The marchesa had good-naturedly come up from her

villa in Biarritz to make this trip, but her good-nature rarely extended as far as her tongue.

The one person who did not find the long pleasant day entirely satisfactory was Ferdinand de Tournelles; and mischievously Estelle noted his moodiness toward the close of the journey, when he and she and the deaf aunt were again alone in their automobile.

"You look drooping, my friend. You did not like it, perhaps, that when I invited our fair American cousin into my car, after luncheon, her tall husband calmly included himself in the invitation?"

"It crowded the car," Ferdinand answered indifferently.

Estelle's eyes danced. The exhilaration of the weather and the swift smooth movement had kept her in impish spirits all day.

"You did not think of a companion for me," she replied reproachfully. "You would have left me to point out the beauties of the landscape to my worthy aunt, while you were immersed in — philosophical — conversation with the American — Eh, what?"

"Deuced bourgeois of a man never to let his wife out of his sight!" Ferdinand growled, hardly trying to hide his discomfiture.

"Never mind; his watchdog faithfulness is a great compliment to your powers."

“Well, I don’t care for such open compliments.”

“Be careful, Ferdinand; that was almost an epigram. Epigrams and love don’t go together. A man who makes epigrams can only be in love with himself. It is the moony, love-sick swain who wins out four times out of five. That’s the way Germaine was captured by that penniless young officer, who had n’t a thing to recommend him except his disabilities. By the way, I hear she has taken a villa a few miles out of Biarritz to moult her mourning in.”

“Really?”

“You are not interested. Well, neither am I, — unless — let me see —” Her eyes narrowed, and a smile began to play about her lips. She turned suddenly to her companion and asked: “You still have that hunting-lodge of yours on the edge of the Pyrenees?”

“Yes, I was thinking of giving some sort of little fête there while we were in Biarritz. It’s only an hour’s ride by motor.”

Estelle smiled broadly.

“What is it?” Ferdinand asked.

“Nothing — only an idea. The Fates sometimes play into the hands of an industrious young person like me.”

De Tournelles looked at her doubtfully. “I mistrust your playing with the Fates, my pretty cousin.”

"You of all persons should not mistrust me. It was of your success I was thinking — and of Germaine and her villa, the location of which I happen to know."

Ferdinand still regarded her doubtfully. "Is it over Germaine you are smiling? I thought you two never got along together. Have you experienced a change of heart, since she lost her husband?"

Estelle made a face. "I don't care for her any more than I used to — it's Roland that likes her better than he does me. Just the same, it was over her that I was smiling. Roland has n't yet learned that she is here. I shall tell him — when it suits my little plans."

"What plans are those?"

"If they blossom, I will let you know — and you may pluck the flower. By the way, have you heard that the de Longtours are only going to stay in Biarritz two or three days?"

"The devil!" Ferdinand muttered.

"Oh no, not the devil, only Roland again — another compliment to you. But look there! Isn't that your eminently respectable brother coming down the road in his runabout?"

It was indeed Casimir d'Érouville, who had been lost among the Pyrenees for three weeks, but happening to learn of this trip had rushed down to meet them. Giving his car to the chauff-

feur, he clambered eagerly into Roland's machine and rode there the rest of the way. His gay simple presence sent a wave of homesickness over Stephana for the country life of Touraine with which he was associated, and she thought with more pleasure than hitherto of her promise to go to Brittany.

She slept well that night, after the long day in the open, and woke up late the next morning, rested in body and nerves. With a feeling of pleasant languor, she had her chocolate brought to her in bed, and afterwards dressed at her leisure. She was hardly ready when word was brought up to her that Estelle was waiting to see her, and a minute later that never-tiring person tripped into her sitting-room to propose a plan for the morning.

"Come with me in my car to the dearest little inn in all France — just we two and nobody else. It is our only chance for a quiet time together. There will be something doing all the rest of the time we're here — and you deserting us in two days! For a wonder there's nothing on for to-day until the marchesa's garden party to-night. We'll stay to luncheon, and play about in an old rose-garden. It's a day when you could be happy digging holes in the earth. We *will* dig holes, or, if you're too proud, *I'll* dig holes while you pluck roses. No, don't try to think of any objections, for there are n't any. And you need n't consult

your precious Roland. I met him half an hour ago, and he's off in his motor on some jaunt of his own, so you are quite free."

Sweeping her off her feet, Estelle had Stephana in her car and gliding through the country before she knew it. The day was certainly excuse enough for being out in the open country, and Estelle rattled on so amusingly that Stephana's vague distrust of her was put aside. Whatever of malice there might be in the Comtesse de Maurienval was generally so overlaid with high spirits that one could hardly believe in its existence.

"We will go by a roundabout way, though it is not far, and we can return by the more direct route, if you wish. It will give us an appetite for luncheon — and I tell you that Mère Baudoux's meals are worth some little pains in the matter of acquiring an appetite."

They arrived at their destination, a little white house set in a luxuriant garden of roses, of every kind and color. A trellis of red roses arched the entrance, and there was little about the place to suggest the inn, except the effusive welcome of the landlady.

At the back of the garden a knoll was crowned by a summer-house, evidently intended for little meals. From it one had an outlook over the rear of a larger villa and its wide, rambling garden.

"Let us sit in the summer-house," Estelle said.

"The sun has really become uncomfortably warm, and it will be delightful to rest here in the shade. When luncheon is ready," she added to Madame Baudoux, "you may bring it out here."

To Stephana the sun did not seem at all too warm, but she acquiesced in Estelle's plan.

"What a delightful place this would be for a honeymoon," the countess exclaimed, with a wave of her hand at the rose-sprinkled garden. "I suppose you are wishing you had Roland here with you, instead of my humble self. Now don't try to deny it. My feelings are not at all hurt. A woman never stands a chance with another woman against a lover. And there is no doubt that Roland has quite a caprice for you at present. That is what it is to be admired by other men. It makes a man in love even with his own wife. Poor Pierre! He was quite sad at having to go off and visit the Aurora Borealis in Norway just now — I mean the fiords. My dear, you must always try to have some other man wild over you. It's the only way to be happy though married."

Stephana shook her head, remembering poor Bertha's venture under this guidance.

"I am afraid that is a Frenchwoman's game, and I should not be expert at it."

Estelle de Maurienvall laughed her infectious laugh. "My very precious one, you are a Frenchwoman, because you have married a Frenchman

— and Roland, in spite of his English education, *is* a Frenchman. Don't you see how fascinated he is by you, simply because you have fascinated other men? Suppose you had had no success in Paris, do you imagine he would care to be seen so constantly with you as he is? Look at the Montignollis! They are having a second honeymoon, just because my Pierre found her attractive; and if this will work with the volatile Giacomo, it will work with any man."

To argue seriously with the countess when she expressed her light philosophy seemed ridiculous to Stephana. But the countess required no argument to-day to keep her spring of conversation welling over. She apparently wished for no rest, in spite of the comfortable chairs she had had brought out from the inn; nor did she remember her proposed innocent occupation of digging holes in the earth. Her vivacity was feverish. She forsook her chair for the wooden bench running around the summer-house. From it she sprang up to examine the vines clambering up the trellis-work which formed the sides of the summer-house; and all the time she talked, till Stephana found herself wishing for a little interval of quiet.

"Oh, look — " Estelle cried, then stopped.

Something in the tone caused Stephana to glance in the direction in which Estelle was staring. About fifty yards away, in the next gar-

den, Roland was walking with a handsome young woman and a child. Her arm was through his, in an attitude of assured possession, while on the other side the little boy was holding his hand. They were strolling across the garden, and were lost presently around the corner of the house.

Stephana sat, as if turned to stone, till they were gone. Her first coherent thought was the intuition that Estelle had brought her here to see this very thing. This explained her nervousness, her choosing the summer-house to wait in, all her manœuvres which had led up to this dénouement. In Stephana, as she realized this, the strongest instinct was to hide from her enemy the hurt she was enduring; to get out of here without tears, without a breakdown to afford the countless satisfaction.

"I am sorry," stammered Estelle, with every appearance of contrition. "Who would have thought that he would come up here, when you were —"

Stephana rose to her feet, disregarding the halting explanations.

"Since you have accomplished that for which you brought me here, there is no use our staying for luncheon, is there?" she asked with perfect self-possession.

For once the Comtesse de Maurienval was at a loss for words.

CHAPTER XXX

“AS THE OLD FRENCH NOBILITY WENT TO THE GUILLLOTINE”

WHEN Roland returned after luncheon and wished to see her, Stephana sent word that she was going to rest all the afternoon. She ate nothing, and spent the time in her room, in a cold fury against her husband that made her absolutely insensible of the passage of time. Infinitely she would have preferred, she told herself, a man like de Maurienva, like Montignolli, like Ferdinand. Ferdinand! he seemed an honest man compared to her hypocritical husband. At least none of the three lived daily lies. They pretended to be no better than they were.

Go to Brittany, and come to some understanding with him? Yes, some understanding that would insure him against the possibility of a public scandal, while permitting him to continue to go his own way as he had done hitherto. She recalled the case of a certain titled Frenchman, wedded to one of America's daughters, who had forced her to adopt and legitimize his mistress's son, since she, his lawful wife, had borne him no heir. Perhaps the Duc de Longtour desired some

such "understanding" as this with her, that his noble name might not become extinct.

His son! *There* was the bitterest pang of all. Somehow it had never occurred to Stephana that there might be a child. His existence put the seal of finality on the situation. What was bad enough before, became impossible now.

Stephana did not know how quickly, how slowly the time passed. It might have been a minute, it might have been an æon, when word came up from the duke asking at what time she would be ready to go to the Marchesa Bignatelli's garden-party.

"A garden-party!" Stephana laughed aloud. It was not hysteria; she had got beyond that. Yes, she would go to the garden-party — go as the old French nobility went to the guillotine, with a laugh on their lips, their heads high, and despair in their hearts.

In the lobby of the hotel, as the Duc and Duchesse de Longtour passed through it, was sitting a slight man of striking appearance. In the thirties, his hair was turning gray, and deep lines of thought were on his forehead. By his features he was either a Jew or had Jewish blood in him. He was watching those that came and went, idly, yet with something that bespoke more than the ordinary man's interest in humanity. A writer he might be, or a physician; possibly a lawyer.

When his eyes rested on Stephana, it was as if he were fascinated by the sight of her. He leaned slightly forward, and scrutinized her features. And indeed there was an almost unearthly quality to her pale beauty to-night.

From her he naturally glanced at her companion, and instantly was on his feet with an exclamation of delight, his hand outstretched toward Roland. The latter returned his greeting, and then presented Dr. Bartholemy to his wife.

"I cannot tell what gratification it is to me to meet the wife of the man who once saved me from despair — it may be from death," he said, bowing profoundly over Stephana's hand.

"Pooh!" the duke ejaculated.

"My husband seems to have spent his youth saving people's lives," Stephana said, with a smile that hid the bitterness in her heart.

"But what are you doing here?" Roland put in. "I thought you had established yourself at Toulouse. You may not be aware, Stephana, that evil-minded germs are more afraid of Dr. Bartholemy than they are of all the armies in the world."

"Ah, madame," Dr. Bartholemy protested, "it is a safe compliment. The duke knows that germs have no fear whatever of armies." He turned to Roland. "I am on a little vacation. I find rest easiest among the frivolous. My occu-

pation keeps me so much among the realities of life that I recuperate among its artificialities."

"You are not, by chance, intending to refresh yourself at the Marchesa Bignatelli's to-night, are you?" Stephana asked.

"Yes, I am going," Dr. Bartholemy replied eagerly. "I had intended going late, but now I shall go early."

"Come along with us," Roland urged hospitably. "There is plenty of room in the car."

"Thank you, but I am not quite ready to go yet."

"Then *au revoir*," Stephana said, with a gracious nod.

Dr. Bartholemy looked thoughtfully after her as she walked away, her head never more proudly erect than to-night. "The most beautiful woman I have seen," he thought. Then, shaking his head: "And near a breakdown, if ever I saw the signs." For some minutes he was lost in conjectures. "There was more than misery in her face: there was tragedy. How can the wife of Roland de Longtour wear that look?"

During the short mile to the marchesa's, the subject of the doctor's meditations was silent. She carefully avoided the slightest contact with her husband. Roland, disregarding her aloofness, tried to tell her how he had spent the day, but presently desisted. She was paying no atten-

tion to him: of what interest to her were the lies — or the half-truths doing the work of lies — he was telling her?

When Stephana entered the garden of her hostess, the Russian, Prince Dionosoff, caught sight of her and stopped, on his way to execute a behest of the marchesa's.

“A lovely creature!” he ejaculated to himself, lost in admiration, and utterly forgetful of his errand, until the lady of his vows came upon him and in a sharp skirmish brought him to heel again.

He was not the only man to be fascinated by Stephana. Men clustered about her to-night even more than they had in Paris, and her lips spoke the sprightly words required of her. In men, suffering sometimes brings out the nobility of their natures, it rarely inspires them to brilliancy; but some women have the gift of becoming more brilliant the more they suffer. Stephana was of these, and only the man of science — and one woman — that night suspected her of not being in the best of spirits. To her everything was intensified, rarefied. The lights were brighter, the voices clearer and more musical. She could hear twice as far as usual. All values were higher. It was as if she were breathing pure oxygen; she was living life in the *n*th degree. The weirdly lighted garden chimed in with her mood. The

whole beautiful world was illusion and unreal, like this fairyland of a garden — candles and colored paper! Hopelessness underlay the universe.

Dr. Bartholemy, arriving a half hour after the de Longtours, managed by quiet persistence to secure a quarter of an hour of Stephana's attention. They went off to an arbor at some distance from the majority of the guests, and somewhat bluntly he brought the conversation back to the debt of gratitude he owed to Roland.

"The duke does not care to have one remind him of the service he has been to them, but I should like to speak to you about it. During my military service an officer accused me falsely. I will spare you the details. It was an infinitesimal Dreyfus case; but to me, poor and friendless, it was not infinitesimal — it was large as the pyramids, and terrible as death. As death, do I say? It was more; for I had made up my mind to kill myself, when your husband saved me. It was not as if we were friends. In our different station in life we could not even be acquaintances. But now that I am no longer poor and friendless, I would lay down my life for him."

Stephana listened as if she only saw his lips moving. Nothing any one could say now made any difference. Whatever Roland's good qualities, they were not enough to outweigh the bad

with her any longer: she did not even wish to hear his name mentioned; and presently Dr. Bartholemy, though more than ever interested in her case, withdrew in favor of the worldlings who strove for the honor of her attention.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE MARQUIS'S STAR IN THE ASCENDANT

FERDINAND DE TOURNELLES arrived late at the marchesa's. He met the Comtesse de Maurienvall on the arm of an Austrian officer. She had quite recovered the equanimity she had lost in the morning.

"Oh, Ferdinand," she called out, as he was hurrying past, "I have cast your horoscope, and I find that your star is at its zenith. If you have any great enterprise on hand, this is the moment for succeeding."

The Marquis de Tournelles, with a faint smile, acknowledged his cousin's words, but did not try to detain her when the Austrian drew her away, jealously demanding to know whether his star, too, were in an auspicious quarter.

And Estelle laughed — laughed at her escort, and at Ferdinand, and at the whole male sex, which winds itself so plially about a woman's finger.

Ferdinand hurried on, looking for Stephana. Man's passion waxes and wanes as the tide. Had Stephana been the most calculating of coquettes she could not have adopted a course more likely

to inflame his love than hers of the last few weeks. Unaccustomed to denying himself anything, his passion for his cousin's wife was consuming him. To-night he was a man demented. Reason had ceased to guide him. To obtain the woman he wanted, he would have brought destruction to the earth, have stopped the stars in their course. Life's worth no more existed for him without the possession of this beautiful creature.

And never in his victorious career had he been so held at arm's length. He was a man before whom the hearts of women fell easily — of such women, at least, as usually attracted him. For the first time now he loved one of another type, and this love gripped him powerfully. Nor was his love wholly base: its very strength lay in its appeal to his higher nature. When he was with her, there stirred in him impulses toward good which had been hibernating during a long winter.

Yet there was nothing of renunciation in his love. He would water his aspirations, sprout virtue, and blossom nobility, only if Stephana were the gardener. He had no impulse to strive for the heights by himself. On the contrary, denied her, he would revenge himself upon an obstinate fate by being worse than ever. There was much of the logic of the small boy in Ferdinand.

Why had he not gone to America instead of Roland? He entertained not the smallest doubt

but that he could have won her, had he gone. Even now he could not really be convinced that he should not obtain a return of his love from her, since he wanted it so intensely. It seemed only reasonable. Himself a worshiper of his own whims, the whimsicality of the things-that-happen had not descended upon him hitherto. A state of bewildered, exasperated incredulity was his attitude toward a fate which could accord him many ignoble conquests, and then deny him this one which would make even the paths of virtue attractive.

The marquis had been detained in coming to the marchesa's, or Dr. Bartholemy would hardly have been able to secure his quarter of an hour alone with Stephana. When he found her, he attached himself to her train of admirers; and one by one the other men fell away and left him in possession of the field. He was so absorbed in Stephana that he barely noticed the presence or absence of other men. When at last he awoke to their being alone, he begged her to go with him to a bower at the far end of the garden. She rose and went with him. It did not matter where she sat.

This end of the garden overlooked the moon-lit ocean, and was less besprinkled with Chinese lanterns. It was very still. The waves lapped the rocks beneath them, and the moon glided imperceptibly across the indigo sky. Some Indian

conjurers had charmed even lovers to the other end of the garden.

Ferdinand sat back in the shadow, whence his eyes might ceaselessly devour the beauty of her face. He did not speak. He was in the grip of emotions which rendered words futile.

Stephana was grateful to him for his silence. She let her memory travel back to the morning, to that other garden with the other woman, and the child, whose eyes she pictured gray like those of Roland. It was the child that made it all hopeless. It gave the other woman rights superior to those conferred by the rites of church and state.

From them Roland had come to her, not cold, indifferent, but carefully polite, considerate, desirous of telling her how he had spent the day — *how he had spent the day!* — lest she should feel neglected and hurt.

And to-morrow he expected her to go with him to Brittany, there to come to some “understanding.” She felt that in spite of what she knew, in spite of what she had seen, she could not trust herself to resist him. She knew the power he had over her, the influence of his voice, and if he chose to plead — ? She was not strong enough to fight for her ideals against the man whom she had chosen to be her husband.

Fear swept through every fibre of her being, and with it an uncontrollable wish to flee from

him to the uttermost ends of the earth. She turned to the marquis.

"Ferdinand! I want to leave Roland. Will you help me? Is there a train? I want to go to-night."

Ferdinand pulled himself slowly together and leaned forward into the moonlight, his burning eyes searching her face.

"You are going to leave Roland?" he asked huskily. For a fleeting instant the hope darted into his heart that it was for him she was leaving her husband.

"Yes, I want to go away," she repeated.

In her utter misery she had to confide in some one, and Ferdinand had always been kind. Bit by bit she told him all — what Estelle had hinted at, and what she herself had seen that morning. And in Ferdinand, listening to her broken words, for one fateful minute good and evil had their last battle. He heard her words and knew that Estelle, from the fullness of her hate, had lied to Stephana — had tortured her and destroyed her happiness, in order to have revenge on the man who had not loved her. A furious gust of anger against his ally shook him, because of the suffering she had caused the woman he loved. Then the tentacles of lust and hatred, which for years had been twining themselves about his soul, regained their grip. A triumph of all that was most

ignoble in him swept away the last appeal of generous manhood.

"Yes, I will help you," he answered hoarsely. "You have endured what no woman could endure — what *you* least of all should have been subjected to. Wait here. I will bring a car to the little side-gate. Yes, there is a train. I will take you to it."

In the mastery of evil in the Marquis de Tournelles, even the sincerity of his love for Stephana, which in a measure had ennobled it, perished. The light of cunning replaced in his eyes the mad but honester light of desire.

He was gone, and years of blank, white moonlight followed, with an ever-shimmering ocean, and little waves forever fretfully breaking against the rocks. At length Ferdinand was again at her side.

She looked up at him with wide-open, lustreless eyes.

"All is ready," he said tensely.

"What?" she asked stupidly.

"Come!" he said fiercely.

She roused herself and rose unsteadily to her feet.

Ferdinand took her arm and led her swiftly to the gate. A car, its motor vibrating, stood there empty. He helped her in, sprang in beside her, and they rode away into the white night.

CHAPTER XXXII

ESTELLE UNMASKS

WITH a bewitching woman hanging on one's arm, and on one's words, in a garden doing its prettiest to please the select, with balls of colored light glowing amid the trees and throwing their soft beams upon well-gowned women and well-groomed men, and with pleasing strains of music delighting the ears, what man would not believe in the good auspices of his star? The Austrian curled the ends of his mustache upward and puffed out his chest. The Comtesse de Mau-rienvall naturally — almost automatically — convinced any man in whose company she was that he was more interesting to her than other men.

The Austrian's equanimity lasted until they met Roland.

"Oh! there is my cousin! I have something I must say to him. You will forgive me for deserting you, will you not?"

The countess spoke with an upward appealing glance — quite automatic.

The Austrian would not at all forgive her, — at least not until he again fell beneath the fascination of her black eyes, — but what can a man do

except to bow acquiescence when a lady begs to be forgiven for preferring the society of another man?

With the privilege of cousinship Estelle thrust her arm through Roland's and drew him away.

"You are to come with me," she said with pretty imperiousness, "and tell me how my sister Germaine is. You went to see her this morning, did n't you? Is she well? Does she seem much broken up over the death of her husband?"

"I am surprised your sisterly anxiety did not lead you to call on her yourself," Roland replied dryly.

"Now don't be preachy, Roland," Estelle said, with a pout. "I *was* very near seeing her, if you must know. If I had n't had something more important on hand — Her son is a fine little fellow, is n't he? Tell me, does he resemble the de Longtours at all?"

For three quarters of an hour the two remained together. Estelle spoke simply and earnestly about Germaine and her affairs. Ought not the rest of the family to do something for her, — she had not much money, — or at least see to it that her little fortune was invested to the best advantage? She appealed naturally to Roland as the head of the family and the most responsible of her relatives. It was a wholly new side to the brilliant countess.

After the music began for the dancing on the lawn, Prince Dionosoff approached, peering about in the uncertain light.

"Ah, it is you," he exclaimed, on recognizing them. "I am just looking for the Duchesse de Longtour. Do you know where she is? I am so short-sighted. She promised me a dance."

"My dear prince, you expect us ladies to remember all the things we promise?" Estelle cried. "Our husbands could tell you better than that — eh, Roland?"

"I believe you will learn that the duchess has not forgotten your dance, Dionosoff, when you find her," he said, somewhat stiffly.

"She was with de Tournelles," the prince continued his plaint; "but I saw him go out of the garden alone a few minutes ago. I went after him to ask him where he had left her, but he was too quick for me. Your chauffeur, madame, told me that he had taken your car and gone away."

Estelle's eyes glittered. She drew a long breath. "It is a heavenly night for a drive — with the right person," she said.

"Yes, but the marquis went away alone."

"Poor Ferdinand!" Estelle cried mockingly. "Fancy his wasting all this moonlight on himself."

Prince Dionosoff was a literal kind of person. "Perhaps he wished for solitude," he suggested.

"Perhaps he did. Come, then, let us try to find the lovely duchess ourselves," she exclaimed gayly. "'First catch your hare,' — is that not an English proverb?"

She moved away by the side of the prince, with a backward glance at Roland. On her dark pretty face was an expression of impudent triumph. At ten steps' distance she stopped.

"Wait!" she said to her escort. She ran to Roland, laid her hand on his arm, and looked straight into his eyes.

"I don't think you will find Stephana to-night — and I don't care a fig about Germaine's income."

A smile was on her lips, but the words came from between clenched teeth. Smiling still, she tripped back to the Russian.

The duke knew his cousin to be one of those malicious natures which pride themselves on being good haters, on silently cherishing a grudge until the opportunity comes to satisfy it with interest, accrued and compounded. And he was convinced that she would not at random speak as she had just spoken. When she permitted herself the luxury of showing her hatred, it was because her revenge was accomplished and she had nothing further to gain by dissimulation.

A cold misgiving seized him. Making his way to the entrance of the garden, he stepped outside

and looked about for Estelle's chauffeur. When he found him — although he knew that Casimir had not yet returned from a trip to San Sebastian — he inquired casually if the Marquis de Tournelles had gone off with his brother.

No, he had gone alone, the man answered.

It was what Roland wished to find out, without asking the direct question.

Swiftly, yet without an appearance of haste, he walked around the outside of the garden to see if there were another entrance to it. He turned the corner and came upon a little gate. It stood ajar. A patch of white on the ground attracted his attention. He stooped and picked up a lady's handkerchief. In the moonlight he read the "Stephana" embroidered in one corner.

It was true, then. She was gone. She had left him for Ferdinand de Tournelles. The warning his mother once had given him flashed through his mind, and his own confident assertion that he could protect his wife. Fool that he had been! He had thought his mere presence sufficient to keep the wolves away!

In some way, by some trick, they had cozened her, and managed to lure her away from him. A white hot rage against those who had brought this calamity upon his wife seemed as if it would deprive him of his reason for an instant. Then he crushed back his rage and tried to think what

there was for him to do to repair the evil that had been done. Possibly she had been taken suddenly ill, and had returned to the hotel. He retraced his steps and leisurely got into his motor-car.

"Take me back to the Hôtel du Grand Océan," he said to his chauffeur. Once during the drive he leaned forward and touched the man on the arm. "Faster!" he said.

He sauntered through the lobby to their suite of rooms. Maggie was there. At sight of her he hoped, with a tremendous feeling of relief, that his surmise had been correct.

"Has your mistress returned, Maggie?" he said cheerfully.

"No." The keen old eyes that loved Stephana peered anxiously into her master's face, and noticed the disappointment he could not hide. "Is anything the matter?" she asked.

"Why should anything be the matter?" he parried, to recover from the shock at the death of his hope.

The anxiety which Maggie long had felt at length broke into words.

"Because that countess has been driving my darling wild ever since we came to Paris — bad cess to her! And to-day I don't know what she did when she took her out driving, but my baby was turned to stone when she came back, — and

sure I can't stand it any longer." The tears were trickling down the Irishwoman's face.

The muscles in the duke's cheeks hardened. "Listen, Maggie! Say no word to any one of what we have talked of to-night. Don't cry! I am going out to bring back your mistress, and I wish you to be ready to take care of her when she returns."

"Oh! thank you, your honor!" Maggie sobbed.

The duke went out of the hotel again, to all appearances the nonchalant man of the world, on pleasure bent. On the steps he halted and lighted a cigarette, to give himself time to plan. In spite of his confident words to Maggie, he was at a complete loss how to proceed. Biarritz was a sufficiently large place to hunt for a woman whose name he might not mention.

Estelle! If he could see her for a few minutes alone, he would get the secret from her if he had to wring her neck to do it. But she was safe at the marchesa's. To speak to her there would merely give her the opportunity to spread scandal abroad, which above all else he wished to avoid.

Casimir! He might know something of his brother's habits which would be of use in tracking him. Perhaps he had returned by this time.

The duke sprang into his car and told the man to hurry to the Hôtel du Petit Roi.

"No," the polite clerk regretted, five minutes

later. "Monsieur le comte had not yet returned from San Sebastian."

Roland turned away to hide the blank despair that was overmastering him. Outside a motor was approaching rapidly, and Casimir drew up to the curb in his runabout.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"THE HUNTING THAT ENTRANCED HIS SOUL"

FERDINAND drove cautiously at first, disguising speed with skill; then faster, as the town fell away behind them and a moon-silvered ribbon of road stretched out in front.

Faster yet they sped, the car swaying and leaping. At a dangerous curve he escaped by inches another motor coming from the opposite direction. The marquis's nerves did not flutter at the nearness to accident. His star was in the ascendant to-night, and he could not be harmed. He did not even look back. Had he done so, he would have seen that the other car had stopped and that its occupant was standing up and looking after him.

Stephana at first noticed nothing of the direction in which Ferdinand was taking her. The speed of their tearing through the air soothed rather than alarmed her. When she became conscious of the silent countryside, de Tournelles reassured her by saying that he was taking her to the next station to Biarritz, as safer.

Ferdinand drove that night as if possessed. The dark line of mountains loomed nearer and

nearer. In their foothills nestled his hunting-lodge. He drew a cloak around Stephana's shoulders. Other than for this he did not slacken speed until he turned in at his gate and pulled up in front of his door.

"Is this the station?" Stephana asked, half rousing herself.

"No, that is a little farther on. The train is not due yet. It will be better if we wait here until it is time to take it."

His voice trembled. He sprang from the car and held out his hand to help her.

With instinctive reluctance Stephana descended from her seat and entered the door he opened for her. He struck a match and lighted a candle here and there, and touched the bundle of fagots on the hearth.

No servant appeared, yet everything was in order — in readiness one might have thought. There was none of the roughness or untidiness that would have been quite excusable in a man's hunting-lodge. In one corner was a small table set for two. Upon the walls hung trophies of the chase, and guns, pistols, and other weapons in spotless condition, arranged with the eye of an artist.

A sportsman of the Anglo-Saxon breed might have laughed at hanging up good guns for their decorative value; would have laughed at the

dainty ordering of the whole place: but Ferdinand hunted more than one kind of game, and his pains were not wasted when he was pursuing the noblest of his quarries. He was no amateur amator.

Mechanically Stephana moved toward the fire and held out her cold fingers to its warmth. With subtle misgiving her glance flickered about the high-ceilinged hall and over the decorated walls. The daintiness of the room was hardly suited to a place whence man might arise and kill, according to his primal instincts, and to which he would return, tired and weather-worn, for rest with pipe and glass when sated with slaughter. The exquisiteness around her hinted at other conquests than those which leave their horns and heads behind.

She gave a long shivering sigh, like a child about to awaken from sleep.

De Tournelles was conscious of Stephana's every motion, while he busied himself with her comfort. Here was higher game and shyer game than he had ever bagged before. Often the nets might safely be laid before the eyes of the bird to be enmeshed. Stephana was in his power — but she was not yet his.

He placed a chair by the fire and made her sit down. Deftly he lighted more candles in various parts of the room, till a soft cosy light filled it; and

held the match to the alcohol lamp on the supper-table. All the time Stephana's brain was becoming more and more active, and she tried to reason herself out of the vague alarm which crept over her. Nervously she spoke to him once or twice, for above all she must not let him see that she was afraid of the loneliness of the place, afraid of the hour, and especially afraid of him. Surely she told herself once and again — with her American traditions about men — no gentleman would do harm to a woman.

Ferdinand lifted the little table, and brought it to where Stephana sat.

She jumped up. "Oh, Ferdinand, I am sorry you took all this trouble for me. It must be time to go now."

"Not quite yet," he answered, his voice sounding strange; "and you must let me make you comfortable while you stay. My hunting-lodge has never been honored by so fair a visitor before."

Stephana resumed her seat. Her manner became more animated, and she affected to treat this as a little adventure. Though it nearly choked her, she ate of the food he gave her. Once or twice she could not prevent a nervous shiver from running over her. Were there present the ghosts of the honor of other women to warn the young duchess?

Ferdinand saw the shiver, and turned higher

the flame of the alcohol lamp, while he mixed the ingredients of a stimulating drink. He himself touched almost nothing.

“Drink this!”

He kneeled in front of Stephana and held the steaming glass to her lips. He could hardly breathe. Emotion was suffocating him at her lovely nearness. Here was the hunting that entranced his soul. To-night she enraptured him ten times more than ever. The blood throbbed in his temples. The ecstasy of desire was upon him.

Stephana drank and gave him back the half-emptied glass. He kissed the spot her lips had touched, smiling up into her eyes, and drank the rest. He meant to go very slowly lest he frighten her. But her nearness enthralled him. He bent and took one of her slender hands and brought it to his lips, and with the touch of her flesh the senses which had always been his master, when aroused, dominated him, and the cunning of his mind took its retreat, to slumber until such time as his satisfied senses should give it permission to return.

With a crash he sent the glass he was holding into the fireplace, and throwing his arms around Stephana, spoke to her in broken sentences of love, as men like de Tournelles understand it when their passion rules.

Stephana's fear, although at its climax, did not

paralyze her. On the contrary, her mind was extraordinarily alert.

Clasping her fingers firmly about his hands, she unwound his arms from her waist, saying gently : —

“Ferdinand, in my great need I turned to you as a friend I could trust. You are not going to make me regret my trust in you?”

“But I love you, Stephana — I adore you!” the marquis cried, this supreme fact outweighing all else.

“You are adding to my unhappiness, my friend, by speaking thus.”

“Ah! I will make you forget your unhappiness. I will teach you the divine pleasure of love as you have never known it — as I alone can teach it!”

He attempted again to clasp her in his arms; but the indignation which she had been suppressing mastered her, and she repulsed him so violently that from his precarious balance he was sent sprawling on the floor.

He scrambled to his feet. Stephana was at the far end of the room, breathless, a wild fear dilating her dark eyes, though even yet she could not believe herself unable to dominate him by her wishes. But as he sprang toward her, mortification and lust stamped on his features, she was deceived no longer.

She snatched a dagger from the wall. "If you touch me I will kill you."

The man stopped. The lithe girl with the gleaming dagger in her hand and the desperate light in her eyes, her bare shoulders and arms whiter than her white dress against the dark red background of the wall, made a picture an artist would have raved over. And the artist in Ferdinand's complex nature, even amid the tumult of his emotions, was roused.

"God! but you are ravishing!" he exclaimed.

He feasted his eyes on her, while the red of shame slowly mounted to Stephana's brow. Then he turned carelessly away, and as her vigilance relaxed, with a sudden swift blow he struck the dagger to the floor.

Catching both her hands in his, he dragged her struggling to the centre of the room.

"Aha! my pretty one, you forgot that you had an old fencer to reckon with."

"Ferdinand!" Stephana implored. "Let me go and you will always remember that you have been merciful to a woman."

"But," he protested indignantly, "do you suppose I have schemed and waited all these months for nothing?"

"Ah! then you deliberately trapped me?" Stephana cried, trying to free her wrists from his hands.

"Yes, I trapped you, and I would do it again," he exulted. "I love you! I love you! Stephana, you do not yet know what love is. It is worth committing any crime for."

She writhed, powerless, in his grasp. "If you keep me here to-night, I shall kill myself," she said.

He laughed. "Oh, I've heard all that before; and you will weep oceans of tears, and bewail the day you ever met me, — but usually this comes afterwards. Come, Stephana, don't spoil the night for both of us."

Stephana made a last attempt to move his better nature.

"Ferdinand! you have me at your mercy: I appeal to your generosity, to your chivalry, to your manhood, to let me go."

De Tournelles laughed again triumphantly.

But Stephana was no longer looking at him. Limply her arms relaxed, and she stared past him, transfixed.

Instinctively de Tournelles glanced over his shoulder. In the doorway stood the Duc de Longtour.

"You are appealing, Stephana, to qualities the marquis discarded long ago."

The eyes of the two cousins held each other with the steely look of men whose hatred is such

that words are useless to give it expression. Roland spoke again in quite his ordinary voice: —

“You took the duchess for a stroll. Now we will return to the marchesa’s. Prince Dionosoff is waiting for his dance.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT BAY

ROLAND, Stephana, and Casimir entered the gardens by the side-gate. Ferdinand returned Estelle's car whence he had taken it, and came in through the main entrance — alone, as he had gone out. During his solitary drive to town his hatred of Roland had been mounting within him until he was nearly consumed by it. He ground his teeth at the remembrance that to-night, but for his ill luck, he would for all time have evened the score between them. His revenge had been in his hands, only to be wrenched from him at the last moment. Every sense, every faculty of his was merged into hatred of his cousin; and he looked forward to the inevitable encounter with fierce joy.

As soon as he was again within the marchesa's gardens, his bold glance darted everywhere in search of the de Longtours. So far from wishing to avoid the man and woman he had tried to wrong, he no sooner caught sight of them, standing with the marchesa and a group of people watching the dancing, than he walked up to them.

"You are thinking of dancing at last?" he said to Stephana, seizing the opportunity for insolence.

It was the duke who replied.

"Over there is Prince Dionosoff. Will you tell him that the duchess is ready to dance with him now."

The tables were turned, and there was nothing for the marquis to do except obey. After all, he was outwardly a gentleman.

The marchesa laughed as he walked off. "Do you always order your cousin about like that?" she asked.

The duke smiled without answering.

A few minutes later Stephana was dancing with the prince; and Roland moved away among the guests until he found Dr. Bartholemy. He drew him to one side and spoke with him for some time. Afterwards he returned to the dancing, and stood watching the scene before him in placid contemplation, as if he found the greatest satisfaction in attendance on social functions.

Ferdinand strolled up to him.

"I thought you were only a Basque," he said, with an open sneer; "but to-night you have shown some de Longtour traits."

"You may find me more de Longtour than you will care for before the night is over," the duke replied evenly.

"Ha! ha!" Ferdinand laughed lightly. "And what is our next move?"

"Swords."

"With all my heart, although the customary etiquette gives the challenged party something to say about the choice of weapons. If you had had my experience in these little affairs — However, you will know next time."

"I care nothing for the etiquette of dueling. I fight you because —"

"And I would fight you with my fists and my teeth like a savage," Ferdinand interrupted passionately. "I would fight you as dogs fight, until I had bitten your heart out."

With the words he turned away, afraid lest he might forget himself, and strike or spit upon the man he hated so virulently.

Later his half brother, Casimir, came to him. "After Roland has taken Stephana to her hotel he will meet us at your hunting-lodge. He will bring a surgeon. I will take you up in my run-about."

Ferdinand nodded.

When Stephana's dance with Prince Dionosoff was over, the duke said to her quietly, "Come!"

They bade adieu to the marchesa, and were making their way to the entrance, when they came face to face with Estelle de Maurienval. Roland

smiled pleasantly. Estelle stared at them. She looked frightened.

Upon reaching their suite in the hotel, Maggie, tear-stained and anxious, rushed up to Stephana. "Me darlin'!" she cried.

Stephana passed on into her sitting-room, where her husband followed her alone.

"I am going out again for a while," he said slowly, "and I want you to give me your word that you will do nothing — absolutely nothing — till I see you again."

"Very well."

"Thank you."

The candles were guttering in their sockets when Ferdinand and Casimir reached the lodge. The fire was cold and gray in the fireplace. The festive little supper-table looked untidily incongruous. On the hearth glittered bits of broken glass, and the stale scent of punch was in the air.

Roland and Dr. Bartholemy arrived a few minutes later. The doctor was an expert motorist, and Roland knew the way as if it had been burned into his brain.

Ferdinand was awaiting them, debonairly leaning on the mantelpiece, a cigarette between his lips. The duke walked up to him.

"I used to do you the compliment of believing that the women whose lives you ruined chose to

come to you. I did not know that you plotted with a pandering woman to entrap them."

The Marquis de Tournelles shrugged his shoulders.

"You made the unfortunate discovery of your wife having supper with me here alone. You desire the usual injured husband's reparation, I suppose," he sneered.

Although the duke's eyes blazed in his pale face, he answered coldly: —

"I am neither the usual husband, nor am I injured by you. In some way that I do not yet know you and Estelle entrapped my wife here. I found her appealing to your manhood to let her go, — and you were laughing at her."

For all his calmness the duke's face was not pleasant to look upon. There was in it the agony for what his wife had suffered that transcended anything a man can feel for himself.

To Ferdinand it was as wine to the drunkard. Loudly he laughed.

"I made love to your beautiful Stephana, and she came with me. What could you expect? She bought you — and regretted her bargain. Some one had to console her. Why not keep her in the family?"

For an instant it appeared as if Roland would spring upon this man. By a tremendous effort he mastered himself.

“One chance — one chance I will give you,” he muttered to himself, his head thrust forward between his shoulders. “Your death is not enough. For half an hour we will fight, here in this room, without interruption. If you can wound me in that time you may go free — what is left of you. If not, then you must go — out of Europe — out of America — out of the civilized world — forever! Will you fight on those terms?”

“And if I refuse?” Ferdinand asked, startled. Deep as was the hatred between him and his cousin, he had expected only the usual duel, in which the seconds would strike up the swords at the first scratch.

“Then we fight on until I have killed you.”

As had been said, Ferdinand was no coward, yet he blanched at the words. He knew too much of Roland’s skill to venture into a death-struggle with him.

“But that is barbarous!” he protested. “The surgeon —”

“Look well at the surgeon,” Roland interrupted.

For the first time de Tournelles scrutinized his face. “The little Jew, Bartholemy,” he gasped.

“Yes, the Jew whom you baited, the Jew for whose happiness and honor you had no more consideration than you have for those of women.

Your record has not been clean anywhere," the duke said sternly.

An ugly, hunted look came into the marquis's face. His glance roved from one to the other of the three men: the half brother whom he despised because he could not corrupt; the Jew whose life he had all but ruined; and the cousin whom he had tried to wrong more grievously than the other two.

Yet there gradually arose within him a hope: Roland wished to banish him, not to kill him. He could, therefore, fight recklessly, attacking always, without having to defend himself — an immeasurable advantage. In spite of the duke's skill it would be a miracle if he could not wound him under these conditions — wound him, yes, kill him, perhaps. Roland had never fought a duel; he might find it different from fencing. He himself was an old hand at it: there had been many men to whom he had owed reparation.

Fierce lust of battle welled up within him

"I accept your conditions," he cried. "Let us fight!"

Casimir and the doctor cleared away the necessary space in the middle of the hall, and as the hour struck this strange duel began.

CHAPTER XXXV

DE LONGTOUR ENOUGH

WITH tigerish ferocity Ferdinand sprang at the duke, but was quickly undeceived in his expectations. Roland, never more cool in his life, parried his cousin's onslaught, and in less than ten seconds his own sword slid forward, like the dart of a snake's tongue, and pinked Ferdinand in the shoulder.

Maddened by the pain and by the harmless gliding aside of his own fiercest lunges, Ferdinand grew absolutely reckless in his attack; but like bees stinging an impudent adventurer into their realm, the point of Roland's blade pricked him on arm, on cheek, on breast.

Once, when he thought he surely had reached his foe, he found his own sword instead gone from his grasp and ringing along the floor. Scornfully Roland watched him recover it.

Panting, covered with sweat, maddened by his wounds — scratches though they were — Ferdinand had to desist for a space. He breathed hard and staggered from fatigue, his face was red to bursting, his arms leaden. He was not what an athlete would call in good condition.

“Bah! how I hate you!” he fairly screamed. “I would give half my life to pierce your heart—to kill you—to mutilate your face!” and with renewed fierceness he sprang again at his enemy.

Roland, breathing deeply and evenly, was only flushed. In his eyes a cruel light flickered. And now began the baiting of the marquis. Hither and thither he was driven before the relentless point. A delicate lunge pierced his ear and half tore it from his head. A prick in the throat—barely breaking the skin—lent terror to his countenance, as he realized how utterly he was in Roland’s power. Again the merciless point, with a little sidewise flick, cut through his nostrils and tore open his cheek to the mutilated ear.

“Well, am I *de Longtoure* enough for you now?” Roland sneered. “You will not carry your beauty with you among the barbarians.”

The half hour struck.

The room swam before the marquis. Paris, all that made life dear, was slipping from his grasp. The skill he had learned with the foils was gone from him. With a last burst of futile rage he slashed at his opponent blindly as if he held a bludgeon in his hands. His sword flew from his grasp, the lights reeled around him, and he fell face downward on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE COLORS OF DAWN

IN the first gray light of the morning the duke entered his sitting-room, walking carefully, as if not to awaken some one sleeping. He stumbled over a figure lying prone upon the floor.

"Why, Stephana, is it you?" he cried, his voice full of alarm. He lifted her to her feet.

"Yes, I must have been asleep," she answered dully, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to find her on the floor. "Are you hurt?"

"Not even a scratch."

"Did you kill him?"

"No. He was n't worth it."

Silence fell between them for a short time. Stephana when she first woke up had been like a little child. Now, gradually, the woman — the desperate woman of yesterday — roused herself.

"You need not speak so contemptuously of others, merely because you are able to keep your own acts hidden from the world."

"What is it that I kept hidden?" the duke asked wearily.

"Did it never occur to you that it was hardly

possible to keep reports of the life you were leading from my ears?"

"There is nothing in my life of which you may not know."

"No? Not even of the woman who lives in the white villa near here? Estelle took me there to-day, and I saw you with her, and — and with your son. Yes, your child! I saw you walking with them in the garden. I was in the summer-house of the inn next door. I had not been told of the child before, and — oh! it was the child that made it all so hopeless!"

"Stephana, stop!" Roland cried. "*Whom* was it Estelle showed you?"

She was trembling violently, and had to support herself with the back of a chair to keep from falling.

"Oh! you know! And this morning when I saw you with them, I knew that there was nothing more to hope for — that they would always be between you and me. I only wanted to leave you after that, and I asked Ferdinand to take me to the train, and he took me where you found me."

"But, Stephana, will you please tell me a little more," he said in a slow, wondering tone. "The morning after we arrived in Touraine — then you had not seen Estelle, and yet that was when it began."

"Yes, that was the morning when I overheard

your mother say that you had had to marry me on account of my money; that you had made this great sacrifice for your sisters, and that — I forget all the things now. It does n't matter; only I wish — I wish I had never seen you in New York."

She sank into a chair, sobbing miserably.

As she had been speaking, doubt, amazement, and anger had chased each other across Roland's countenance, to be succeeded by a dawning hope which transfigured him.

He kneeled before his wife, yet not daring to touch her hand.

"Stephana!" he said in a tone which even in her misery thrilled her, "the woman you saw me with this morning was Germaine, Estelle's sister. She has just lost her husband — and that was their little boy."

Exultantly he went on: "And the lies you believed had power to make you miserable? Then you did not marry me only for my — to please your family?"

Stephana was staring at Roland with almost the look of one demented in her dark eyes.

"But the woman you have always loved," she stammered.

"There never was one, dear, until I went to America. I *did* go there to marry money; but I could not bring myself to do it until that day

when I met you — when the wind of fate brought us together. I married you believing that I could make you happy when we should be in Touraine together. But how was I to come to you and say, 'I love you,' at the same time that I was telling your father I should have to have money with you? How could I speak of love to you, knowing that I could not have done so had you been penniless? If you knew how hard it was, Stephana!"

"Then you — then there is no woman whom you love?" Stephana asked again, hardly seeming to understand his words.

"As God is my witness there has always been one woman whom I have loved, ever since the first day I saw you, — and there is no other."

Miracles were taking place before the wondering eyes of the girl, and her starved heart was unable to take in at once that of which it had been deprived so long.

"Then you love me!" she repeated again and again. "And all they told me — all they hinted to me — was not true. You are not saying this — to punish me afterwards by telling me it isn't so?"

"Stephana — my wife!" He took her in his arms and gazed into her delicate, upturned face with awe at the thought that at last she was his very own. "Dearest, I thought I had suffered, but

how I should have suffered could I have guessed what you were going through!"

He drew her to him, and with infinite tenderness kissed her: kissed her lips and her eyes and her hair, with the pent-up love of many months.

Faint with happiness she lay in his arms. Only the present certitude of him could repay her for the months of doubt and misery she had gone through.

Opening her eyes, she held him off a little from her, that she might look deep into his gray eyes; and he was reminded of another time when she had looked at him.

"Do you remember, on board the steamer, when you asked me why I had married you — and my hat blew off?" he asked.

She gave an almost imperceptible nod.

"I did not answer you then; but I married you because I loved you — as I love you infinitely more now."

"I used to have glimpses of you, Roland," she said, "but I threw them out of my heart, believing them false. Now I shall have to go around and gather them all up again."

After another long scrutiny of him she asked:

"You are now yourself, — and you will never again be cold and formal and polite?"

He crushed her to him.

"I am your lover, dearest, and I shall never be

politer than this!" And again his kisses devoured her, and quickened in her the blood that had been frozen during the long night.

And from the east the radiant colors of the dawn came gloriously into the room, as they had already come into the life of Stephana Brennan, Duchesse de Longtour.

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

THE STORY OF THYRZA

By ALICE BROWN

"Miss Brown has succeeded in delineating a temperament at once splendid and appalling. . . . It is not enough to say that the book is a study in American psychology ; it must be added that it is an excellent example of American literary methods."

Chicago Tribune.

"Thyrza, a creature combined of compelling imagination, soaring fantasy, Puritan iron, and sacrificial fire, is an appealing figure, illumined with more of the light of genuine inspiration than one often finds in American novels." — *New York Times.*

"Altogether, without Thomas Hardy's melodrama, the people are reminiscent of his peasants, with strange passionate natures hidden within dumb patient breasts ; simpler and in many ways more convincing."

Boston Globe.

With frontispiece in color by Alice Barber Stephens
Large crown 8vo, \$1.35 *net.* Postpaid \$1.50

HOUGHTON
MIFFLIN
COMPANY



BOSTON
AND
NEW YORK

THE EVASION

By EUGENIA BROOKS FROTHINGHAM

Author of "The Turn of the Road."

"The latest human products of a Puritan heritage and a Boston environment are portrayed in this novel with much the same sort of artistic realism that Mrs. Humphry Ward uses in her chosen field of London and English life." — *Boston Globe*.

"This novel has distinction, social, artistic and moral. . . . Its social distinction is truly typical of Boston society. . . . Well-planned and constructed, it is yet never heavy. . . . The moral atmosphere of the book is clear and bracing." — *New York Mail*.

"*The Evasion* reflects Boston as accurately as New York was mirrored in 'The House of Mirth.' " —

Chicago Evening Post.

"A fine story, showing vivid ability and power. Every page is absorbing." — *Chicago Record-Herald*.

12mo, \$1.50.

HOUGHTON
MIFFLIN
COMPANY



BOSTON
AND
NEW YORK

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 08816 159 9

